CLASS 814 M43

/814M43T>C1/

NOR[illegible] COLLEGE

LIBRARY

Accession No. 17213 Date Replaced 1925

Given by Library Fund

Clara L. Gaul Librarian

7213 814
M43t

Date Loaned			
Feb 3 '31			
Mar 24 '31			

THE TOCSIN OF REVOLT AND OTHER ESSAYS

Books by Brander Matthews

These Many Years, Recollections of a New Yorker

BIOGRAPHIES

Shakspere as a Playwright
Molière, His Life and His Works

ESSAYS AND CRITICISMS

The Principles of Playmaking
French Dramatists of the 19th Century
Pen and Ink, Essays on subjects of more or less importance
Aspects of Fiction, and other Essays
The Historical Novel, and other Essays
Parts of Speech, Essays on English
The Development of the Drama
Inquiries and Opinions
The American of the Future, and other Essays
Gateways to Literature, and other Essays
On Acting
A Book About the Theater
Essays on English
The Tocsin of Revolt and other Essays

Vignettes of Manhattan; Outlines in Local Color

THE TOCSIN OF REVOLT AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

BRANDER MATTHEWS

PROFESSOR IN COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LETTERS

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1922

Copyright 1922, by
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

Printed in the United States of America

Published September, 1922

In Memoriam

AUSTIN DOBSON

Integer vitæ sclerisque purus

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I	*The Tocsin of Revolt*	1
II	*The Duty of the Intellectuals*	21
III	*The Dwelling of a Day-Dream*	41
IV	*What Is American Literature?*	63
V	*The Centenary of a Question*	79
VI	*American Aphorisms*	97
VII	*A Plea for the Platitude*	117
VIII	*On the Length of Cleopatra's Nose*	129
IX	*Concerning Conversation*	147
X	*The Gentle Art of Repartee*	165
XI	*Cosmopolitan Cookery*	183
XII	*On Working Too Much and Working Too Fast*	203
XIII	*The Modernity of Molière*	217
XIV	*Theodore Roosevelt as a Man of Letters*	229
XV	*Memories of Mark Twain*	251
	Bibliographic Note	295

I

THE TOCSIN OF REVOLT

I

THE TOCSIN OF REVOLT

I

WHEN a man finds himself at last slowly climbing the slopes which lead to the lonely peak of three-score-and-ten he is likely to discover that his views and his aspirations are not in accord with those held by men still living leisurely in the foothills of youth. He sees that things are no longer what they were half-a-century earlier and that they are not now tending in the direction to which they then pointed. If he is wise, he warns himself against the danger of becoming a mere praiser of past times; and if he is very wise he makes every effort to understand and to appreciate the present and not to dread the future. He may even wonder whether he is not suffering from a premature hardening of the arteries of sympathy. He finds himself denounced as a reactionary; and he doubts whether he has the courage of his reactions.

He cannot but be aware that his case has little novelty, since a generation can never understand and appreciate the generation which pre-

ceded it or that which follows it. It can sympathize with the former a little better than with the latter, because we can know our parents more intimately than we can ever know our children after they have once attained to man's estate. Moreover, time has already chosen and consecrated the chief figures of the generation which preceded ours and the effulgence of these outstanding personalities casts into the shade the failures of their time, whereas in the generation which follows ours the leaders have not been elected and the standard-bearers have not yet been able to manifest themselves fully and to separate themselves from the failures, the freaks and the fakes, who are as frequent and as insistently visible in one epoch as in another.

The sexagenarian also perceives that the very young, who are vociferous in indiscriminate laudation of their contemporaries, are not at all anxious that he should understand them and appreciate their enthusiasms. They do not greatly care for his sympathy—or rather they care not at all. In the inelastic intolerance and in the self-sufficient complacency of youth they refuse to waste their attention on him. They have no use for him, as they would phrase it; they dismiss him as a back-number, than which there can be no object more despicable in their

eyes. If they deemed it to be worth while they might even cry out, "Go up, thou bald-head!" and they would utter this insult without any fear of an ursine retort.

They are self-centered and impatient of control. They are inclined to boast themselves as the foes of tradition and as the enemies of convention. They claim a large freedom for themselves; and, like the Puritans of old, they are prone to deny a like freedom to others. Their opinions may be half-baked, but their prejudices are case-hardened. They see no reason to suspect that there may be interstices in their omniscience. They feel assured in their juvenile energy that they "know it all;" and they are not yet old enough to have found out that the man who "knows it all" does not know much,—does not indeed know himself, which is the beginning of knowledge. In their callow immaturity they would only sniff contemptuously if they happened to hear the oft quoted saying of the Master of Trinity, that "we are none of us infallible—not even the youngest of us."

They may dispute among themselves incessantly and vehemently and bitterly; but they present a united front in opposition to their elders and betters, their pastors and masters. And these elders, if they have acquired a little of the wisdom which is the privilege of age, must

recognize that this is natural enough, in fact, inevitable, since it is what the elders did themselves when they had the fleeting joy of being young and of feeling the consciousness of their own untested powers. It is only by action and by reaction that the world moves. Every generation is entitled to prove all things, even if it is also bound to hold fast to that which is good. Every generation transmits to its successor the heterogeny of traditions and of conventions which it found useful and which it therefore esteems precious.

Some of these are as valuable as those who established them believe; but others will not withstand the acid test on the touchstone of time. On-coming youth must be free to select the traditions which are permanently useful and the conventions which need to be preserved. It is free also to make traditions of its own and to set up conventions more in accord with its own conditions. Without conventions of some sort the work of the world cannot be done, as youth always finds out sooner or later, when it seeks to abolish those which it has taken over. There is veracity as well as piquancy in the statement of a forgotten biographer that his hero "renounced the errors of the Church of Rome and adopted those of the Church of England."

The perfervid Romanticists of France in 1830 devoted themselves to disestablishing the outworn conventions of the Classicist drama. They accomplished their purpose; but all unwittingly they were merely substituting the conventions of their own Romanticist theater, which the later Naturalists denounced as pitiably invalid as those which the Romanticists had discarded and destroyed. Already are we beginning to perceive that the Naturalists had perforce to employ their own conventions, which seem to us now as unacceptable as those of the Classicists and of the Romanticists.

It is recorded that in the fiercest moment of the fight of the Romanticists against the Classicists, a play by the elder Dumas was triumphantly successful at the Odéon; and in the exuberance of their delight a group of the more ardent spirits joined hands and danced around the bust of Racine in the lobby of the theater, crying, "It's all up with you, Racine!"—*Enfoncé Racine!* And for the moment at least they seemed to be justified in their joy. But within a score of years the genius of Rachel illuminated the masterpieces of both Racine and Corneille; and they were as triumphantly successful in their turn as the play of Dumas had been at its first performance. Moreover, when Racine again came into his own the play of

Dumas was already forgotten. Perhaps there is a lesson here for the intolerant iconoclasts of today. It may be that some of the reputations they are now annihilating will reveal themselves as solidly rooted as that of Racine.

II

THE conflict between youth and age, between conservatism and radicalism, is unending, because it is eternally necessary to the vitality of the several arts, which need to be reinvigorated generation after generation. Youth will always lack deference for age. Inexperience will always try to throw off the shackles whereby experience seeks to restrain its energy. In fact, the conflict between youth and age is an ever recurring skirmish in the everlasting battle between the individual and society as a whole. Ever since man came down from his tree in the forest primeval, ever since he emerged from the cave which was his home and his castle, he has had to curb his own desires for the benefit of the community of which he has become a part. His family, his clan, his tribe, his city, his state, his nation, even mankind, call upon him continually for self-restraint, for the control of his passions, for self-sacrifice in view of a larger good. He must perforce part with his right to do absolutely as

he pleases, or there would be immediate anarchy. But he must not yield all of it or too much of it or there would be despotism, either autocratic or aristocratic, democratic or socialistic.

It is upon the social bond that the solidity of civilization depends, and also the freedom of the individual by which alone is civilization advanced. The social bond must be neither unduly tightened nor unduly relaxed. Torquemada was the type which is likely to be evolved when the social organization assumes to itself a total control of the individual; and Cain was an early example of the type which rejects all restraint and asserts a man's right to live as he himself may will, regardless of the rights and of the lives of others. The consequences of excessive individualism were revealed in the outrages of the closing days of the Paris Commune; and the consequences of the excessive subordination of the subject to the state were displayed when Germans (who may have been good husbands and devoted parents) sent to destruction the wives and children on the "Lusitania."

These are extreme manifestations of the two hostile principles which govern and always have governed and always must govern man, deciding what manner of life he shall lead and what kind of a creature he shall be. Both principles are necessary; both must be kept active;

and neither must be allowed to master the other. It is as true today as it was when Horace made the assertion, that safety lies in the middle of the road. The path to progress can be kept clear only when the opposing forces are in a state of unstable equilibrium, now swerved to one side by the onset of youth and now swung to the other by the sturdy resistance of age.

But at the present moment, and perhaps more especially in our own country, there are signs of danger. The pendulum is not at rest, and it seems to be swinging a little too far toward overt individualism. If this is the fact, then it is the immediate duty of the elders to point out the peril and to rally to the support of law and order. Possibly, indeed very probably, what we perceive may be only a temporary symptom, due to the excessive exuberance of youthful energy. The menace may pass away unfulfilled, as it has so often in the earlier centuries. The oncoming generation may awaken in time to a full recognition of the truth contained in George Eliot's assertion that "the right to rebellion is the right to seek a higher rule and not to wander in lawlessness." Yet indisputably there is today much that is disquieting. There is not a little evidence of a tendency on the part of the young to refuse allegiance to the social bond, to reject the heri-

tage of the past, to renounce tradition, and to insist upon the insubordinate manifestation of the caprices and vagaries of the untamed and undisciplined individual. We can only trust that the evidence is not as significant as it seems; for that way madness lies.

Yet in life, in literature, in all the arts we cannot fail to perceive an unwonted restlessness, an unprecedented distaste for balance and harmony and proportion, accompanied by a desire to be different, by a seeking for novelty for its own sake, by a relish for eccentricity and freakishness, by a refusal to profit by what has been bequeathed to us by the past. In this new century we have been called upon to admire painting by men who have never learnt how to paint, dancing by women who have never learnt how to dance, verse by persons of both sexes who have never acquired the elements of versification. The tocsin of revolt resounds in ethics as wantonly as in esthetics. In our recent poetry, in our recent fiction, in our recent drama, there is an exaltation of the lawless and the illegal, the illicit and the illegitimate. The red flag has been unfurled over the heads of a mob of fiery youths, who are insistent in proclaiming their rights and who seem to be careless about fulfilling their duties. A host of young fellows are pushing forward, with their atten-

tion fixed only on themselves, selfish, egotistic and boastful. Apparently they are possessed by the belief that they can make a clean sweep of the past and that they can reach to the sky and touch the stars without standing on the shoulders of their predecessors and without profiting by the achievements of these predecessors.

III

Probably this restless movement will soon spend its force as those who are directing it grow older and wiser. Probably the most it can achieve will be only the destruction of inheritances no longer valuable. Yet it may be as well for us to remind ourselves that there has never been any solid advance in any of the arts by any generation except when that generation began where the immediately preceding generation left off. The future must build upon the past. Nothing is more hopelessly futile than the attempt to start fresh. To believe that this can ever be done is to ignore or to be ignorant of history. Progress can be made, not by disregarding what has already been discovered and invented, but only by knowing all these things, by absorbing them, by assimilating them, by combining them, if need be, and by adding discoveries and new inventions.

There is a phrase in constant use among the electrical engineers which is pertinent and illuminating. They are in the habit of speaking of "the present state of the art," asserting that certain improvements greatly to be wished for are not possible in the present state of the art. And it is with the present state of the art as a starting-point that they prepare for the desired advance. In other words, before attempting to go forward, they make sure that they have mastered the technic of their profession and that they know all that has been done and know how it has been done, so that they can prepare themselves to do something which has never been done.

Not a few of those who are in the forefront of the modern movement are apparently full of contempt for the present state of the special art they propose to practise. They affect to despise technic, altho every great artist has always delighted in technical accomplishment. We find in the work of many of these professed innovators an amazing slovenliness of craftsmanship, an appalling disdain for artistry for its own sake. If they were more familiar with the work of the men who have led the artistic revolutions of the past, they would know that these leaders always began by being abreast of the state of the art and by equipping themselves with all the varied

and delicate tools devised by the craftsmen who had gone before.

Victor Hugo, for example, revolutionized French poetry. He was profoundly dissatisfied with the restrictions then imposed upon the lyric and the drama by the rigidity of the accepted rules. But he was successful in his onslaught on an enfeebled tradition and on a false convention only because he was a supreme master of technic, dextrous beyond all the men of his time, possessed of all the secrets of the art of verse. Ibsen, again, was a most potent force; he was responsible for a revival of intellectual interest in the drama; and he too was the most adroit of technicians, the most consummate of craftsmen, finding his profit in the work of the ingenious French playwrights of the middle of the nineteenth century. No doubt, he bettered what he had learned from these Frenchmen, but he had to learn it, first of all; he had to acquaint himself with the state of the art as it was when he began to compose his series of social dramas. So closely does he follow in the footsteps of the French that the 'League of Youth' and the 'Pillars of Society' and even the first two acts of 'A Doll's House' might have been written by a Scandinavian Sardou.

To many Americans, especially to the untravelled, the Russian ballet brought a new

revelation of beauty. It was hailed as an absolute novelty, whereas in fact it represented only the latest stage of a long development of the pantomimic dance, first elaborated by Noverre in Paris in the eighteenth century and in the next hundred years carried from Paris to Milan and Naples, to Vienna and finally to Petrograd. The dancing of Pavlova and of Mordkin was freshly individual; but only by that individuality did it differ from the dancing of Taglioni and Vestris. The mood might be Russian, but the method was Franco-Italian. One of the graceless pretenders who posture to symphonies and interpret poems by gesture alone once curtly dismissed Pavlova's exquisite grace as "toe-dancing." This was a characteristic exhibition of egotistic ignorance. The gracile Russian can dance on her toes, of course, because the ability to do that is an essential part of the necessary technic. But not because she can dance on her toes is it that Pavlova is a haunting vision of floating etheriality.

In music, that most modern of the moderns, Debussy, made himself intimate with all the intricacies of harmony before he ventured upon his own disquieting innovations. In sculpture, that most modern of the moderns, Rodin, proved himself in his early bust of Puvis de Chavannes to be capable of a delicate refinement of modelling

recalling that of the masters of the Italian Renascence; and his later works, which may appear to the careless observer as uncouthly hewn, disclose to the careful expert "the unconscious skill of the modelling hand"—to use George Eliot's apt phrase. And finally, in stage-decoration, that most modern of the moderns, Joseph Urban, had long years of practice as an architect making himself familiar with all the principles of that art and so prepared himself arduously for the task that he was later to undertake.

IV

Before they were ready to risk themselves in the quest for novelty for a purely personal expression, Hugo and Ibsen, Debussy, Rodin and Urban made sure that they were abreast of the state of the art. They had subjected themselves to discipline and submitted to training. Only because they did this in their youth were they able in their maturity to express themselves adequately and interestingly and to advance the state of the art. And this discipline and this training is just what a crowd of clever youngsters now affect to despise, possibly from sheer laziness, but more probably from a sincere conviction that these things are no longer necessary and indeed no longer useful. They seem to believe honestly that the future masterpieces of

literature and of art are to be evolved out of their inner consciousness by some sort of spontaneous generation. They have persuaded themselves that art is as easy as it looks and that a mastery of its processes is the gift of God, freely granted to those who are conscious of possessing the artistic temperament.

In fact, this belief is not infrequently expressed with unsuspected frankness. One of the most distinguished of American mural painters was recently advising an ambitious young fellow from the West, who listened to the counsel courteously and rejected it absolutely. "No," he said, "the School of Rome is not for me, and these art schools of New York are not for me. I have ideas of my own; I consider my temperament my most valuable asset,—and I'm not going to submit to its being interfered with by any rules!"

It would be futile, of course, to call the attention of these self-centered youngsters to Goethe's pungent epigram which Austin Dobson aptly turned into English:

> Saith one: "To no school I belong;
> No living Master leads me wrong;
> Nor do I, for the things I know,
> A debt to any dead man owe."
>
> Which means, in phrasing less polite:
>
> "I am a Fool in my own Right."

Is this attitude the result of impatience, or of laziness, or of inordinate conceit? One acute observer of contemporary conditions has suggested that it is due to the leveling tendency of modern life, "so that men strive frantically to raise themselves above the level by doing something strange, startling, exaggerated, whimsical. To study the laws and methods of literature or the arts, to saturate themselves with traditions, bores them, so they resort to sensationalism, and try to palm it off for originality. . . . Of course, any of them could achieve a similar originality by coming naked up Fifth Avenue." Indeed, there are recent poems and recent pictures which are instantly recognizable as indecent exposures of the nudity of their producers' minds.

It is not difficult to diagnose this green-sickness of the arts but it is hard to prescribe any remedy. The tendency to anarchy, to uneducated individualism, may be evident in all arts and in all countries; but none the less is it certain to subside, because if it persisted too long the several arts would cease to be,—and that is inconceivable, since man needs them all and has developed them in response to his needs. The malady must run its course; and in spite of the expectant treatment of the mature practitioners the young patients will come out of the attack temporarily enfeebled. Perhaps the fever will

soon be shaken off by the stronger and the soberer, better able to resist the infection.

When Richard Wagner, who was once denounced as a dangerous innovator, was a youthful student, he did not like the drudgery of counterpoint. But his instructor, Theodore Weinlig, made him work hard at it for six months, dismissing him then with the remark, "What you have learnt is freedom!" And it was this laboriously acquired liberty within the law which enabled Wagner in the prelude to the 'Master Singers' to work simultaneously in counterpoint five of his leading motives.

Once again is it helpful to quote (in Austin Dobson's rendering,) Théophile Gautier's 'Ars Victrix':

> Yes; when the ways oppose—
> When the hard means rebel,
> Fairer the work outgrows,—
> More potent far the spell.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> O Poet, then, forbear
> The loosely-sandalled verse,
> Choose rather thou to wear
> The buskin—strait and terse;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Leave to the tyro's hand
> The limp and shapeless style;
> See that thy form demand
> The labor of the file.

Sooner or later the tocsin of revolt will cease its clangor. Sooner or later the young men of promise will furl the red flag. They will refuse to fellowship with the fakers. They will tire of facile eccentricity and of lazy freakishness, of unprofitable sensationalism and of undisciplined individualism. They will again seek the aid of tradition and they will toil to master the secrets of technic. They will recognize the validity of Theodore Roosevelt's shrewd saying: "Second-rate work is always second-rate—even if it is badly done." Then and then only will they discover the stern and abiding joy of difficulty resolutely grappled with and ultimately conquered.

(1917.)

II

THE DUTY OF THE INTELLECTUALS

II

THE DUTY OF THE INTELLECTUALS

I

THE French, always keen in classification and apt in nomenclature, have devised a special designation for the men of light and leading, who are indisputably influential in the community yet who rarely descend into the arena of practical politics. These artists and these philosophers, these men of letters and these men of science, figures of national importance, the French are wont to group together and to call them collectively The Intellectuals. Corresponding groups exist in every other country, of course, even if their solidarity and their significance is nowhere else as fully recognized as it is in France; and in every people these Intellectuals may be summoned for service to the state; they may have imposed upon them suddenly a duty not possible of performance by any other group.

When Matthew Arnold paid his first visit to the United States, now thirty-five years ago, he prepared an opening lecture specially for us,

choosing for it a topic from which he could deduce a moral of immediate and permanent importance to those he was directly addressing. He called his discourse, "Numbers, or the Remnant"; and with characteristic courage he warned us that the voice of the people is not to be received everywhere and always as the voice of God. He insisted on the duty laid upon the more thoughtful and the better informed to combat any tendency toward a blind yielding to the pressure of the more ignorant majority. He dwelt upon the supreme significance of a saving remnant of the most intelligent and of the most upright, ready always to resist the momentary unanimity of the mob and capable of holding fast to ancient landmarks no matter how high and how fierce the tide which might seem to be about to batter them down and to sweep them away.

Of course, Arnold was far too shrewd to be tempted to the opposite extreme and to hold with Ibsen that the majority is always in the wrong. The persuasive British critic had derived from his study of French life and French literature not a little of the social instinct of the French, ever a corrective of the excessive individualism which invalidates the preaching of the stern and egotistic Scandinavian dramatist. The majority is not always in the wrong, and the

minority is not always in the right. Yet the multitude is inclined to have fleeting fits of hysteria; and it is then in danger of rushing down a steep place and casting itself into the sea, unless it is recalled to its self-possession by the voice of the few who have kept their self-control. Arnold quoted a pertinent passage from Plato, describing the plight of a people which is deprived of this element of stability:

> There is but a very small remnant of honest followers of wisdom, and they are those who have tasted how sweet and blessed a possession is wisdom, and who can fully see, moreover, the madness of the multitude, and that there is no one, we may say, whose action in public matters is sound, and no ally for whosoever would help the just,—what are they to do?

The same point was more recently made, and with a more direct reference to conditions often occurring in a modern democracy, by Professor George Burton Adams in his Phi Beta Kappa address at Columbia University in the spring of 1917. "For it often happens in the history of democracies that the man who stands in the place of leadership, whose duty it is from his position to point out the way upon which the nation ought to enter, chooses rather to wait until the general opinion makes itself known. When this happens the duty falls with more than

usual weight upon those men who can lead the opinion of their communities; and in every community like this, it is the privilege of the educated man."

Sometimes "the man who stands in the place of leadership," that is to say, the chief magistrate of the republic, is truly a leader, stalwart in maintaining his own convictions and resolute in resisting the pressure of public opinion, when he is convinced that it is being temporarily exerted in the wrong direction. In our own history we have seen many instances of this manly courage, which risked immediate unpopularity to secure an ultimate result beneficial to the whole community. Washington refused to yield to the clamor which insisted that we should again go to war with Great Britain; Grant vetoed the inflation bill; and Cleveland withstood the apparently irresistible demand for free silver.

But there have been other moments in our history when the political leader of the hour has waited until general opinion made itself known and when he has then made himself the mouthpiece and the instrument of the majority even tho he did not himself share its opinions. Of course, this is an abdication of the privilege of leadership; and it reduces the politician conforming to this practise to the contemptible position of the fabled French demagog who was warned

against following the mob and who explained with frank ingenuousness "But I *must* follow them,—I am their leader!"

II

When the foremost officer in the state lacks the vision and the courage to stand up in behalf of the eternal principles endangered for the moment by the misdirected enthusiasm of the majority, then, as Professor Adams says, the duty of the resisting the evil desire of the hours, falls with more than usual weight upon those men who have it in them to be truly leaders, the men of education, of intellect, of intelligence. We are often told that a democracy like ours has no respect for what must be termed the aristocracy of intellect and that this disrespect is proved by the absence of the members of this mentally superior group from the higher places in the government of the city, of the state and of the nation. There is no denying that our Intellectuals have not often held high position in the public service. But this is not a condition peculiar to the United States in the twentieth century.

Only very rarely in any period and in any place have the foremost intellects of that time and of that country been engaged in the actual work of administration and legislation. It is true that Goethe did for a few years have a large

share in the ruling of little Weimar. It is true also that Cæsar, Frederick and Napoleon, Richelieu and Cromwell, Lincoln and Bismarck were all of them men of exceptional acumen and imagination; but it is not as intellectual chiefs that we remember them. Statesmen, however successful, are not likely to be advanced thinkers, pioneers of speculative inquiry; and they would not have been as successful in their own special field if they had been prone to the speculative inquiries which would have separated them in sympathy from the main body of the plain people whom it was their first duty to guide. As President Eliot once put it pithily, "political leaders are very seldom leaders of thought; they are generally trying to induce masses of men to act on principles thought out long before"; and "their skill is in the selection of practicable approximations to their ideal; their arts are arts of exposition and persuasion; their honor comes from fidelity under trying circumstances to familiar principles."

It is when these political leaders are derelict to duty and stain their hands by lack of fidelity to familiar principles that the intellectual aristocracy, the philosophers and the educators, the men of letters and the men of science are under obligation to abandon their several studies for the moment and to testify to the permanence of

the familiar principles which are attacked by the majority and betrayed by its official leaders. It is then their duty to try to resist and to stabilize public opinion, as on other occasions and under other circumstances it is their duty to stimulate and to encourage it. A country is fortunate when the members of its intellectual aristocracy are conscious of this obligation and alive to the privilege it confers; and a country is singularly unfortunate when those who ought to be its chief spirits renounce their chieftainship, step down from their lofty isolation, and throw in their lot with the mob.

Even when there is no emotional excitement in public affairs, the more calmly thinking class has the special function of reacting against the natural national self-glorification,—which may be useful, when kept strictly within bounds, but which is dangerous, not to say deadly, when allowed to run riot. Every powerful and expanding people has a tendency to exalt itself, and to hold itself as indisputably superior to all its rivals. Sometimes this belief is so ingrained and deep-rooted and long-standing that it feels no need for overt expression; it expects to be taken for granted even if unstated; and something of this attitude might have been seen toward the end of the nineteenth century both in France and in England. Sometimes it is a sudden and vio-

lent reaction from previous self-depreciation; it is the swift result of a new national consciousness; and then it is likely to demand vehement proclamation, as tho it were not quite sure of itself and needed to be convinced by the emphatic assertion of its supremacy; and something of this attitude was to be seen in Germany in the early years of the twentieth century. Sometimes it was due not so much to actual achievement as to a sublime belief in the possible accomplishment of the future; and something of this attitude was observable in the boastfulness not infrequently heard in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Whatever the cause of this attitude it calls for constant and vigilant self-criticism. Lowell, both in the verse of a 'Fable for Critics' and in the prose of his essays, shot shafts of pungent wit into the inflated figure of Brother Jonathan distended by self-puffery; and Matthew Arnold was untiring in protest against Macaulay's complacent assumption of British supremacy in literature. Of course, every great people possesses certain qualities in greater abundance than any of its rivals; and equally of course there are other qualities in which it is more or less deficient. Arnold, again, deserved well of his countrymen for the insistence with which he called attention to the French virtues of order and organization, harmony and proportion,—

qualities which he urged his more energetically imaginative countrymen to acquire from their hereditary rivals.

III

It is however not so much in the hours of calm as in the days of national excitement that the influence of the Intellectuals is most useful. When a people is about to be swept off its feet by hysteric emotionalism then there is a burden laid upon "the honest followers of wisdom and those who have tasted how sweet and blessed a possession is wisdom, and who can see moreover the madness of the multitude." A country is then fortunate indeed if its Intellectuals measure up to their duty; and it is sadly bereft if they sink themselves in the mad multitude.

Here in the United States in the dark years after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, our Intellectuals rose to the occasion and were insistent in asserting the iniquity of slavery and the plain right of every man to own himself. The influence of the lyrics of Whittier and of Lowell was direct; but it was probably not more potent than the indirect influence of Emerson's individualistic philosophy.

In Great Britain in the eighteenth century the Intellectuals—always with the exception of Dr. Johnson,—were almost united in opposing the folly of the American policy of George III. And

in the nineteenth century many of the Intellectuals were not in favor of the Boer War; and the stand they then took was one factor in bringing about a final settlement, so liberal in its terms to the defeated party that it assured the lasting unity of the new South African commonwealth.

But it is in France that the Intellectuals have had occasion to exert themselves most often and most effectively. France is fortunate in that she has never lacked men of vision and of courage, willing to stand up to be counted, even if they had to stand alone. In the reign of Louis XV, sunk in lust and corruption, the frail Voltaire cried aloud in the wilderness for justice to Calas and never desisted until the hideous wrong was righted in so far as this might be. In the Second Empire of that shabby and shoddy adventurer, Napoleon III, Victor Hugo, the foremost figure in French literature, remained in voluntary exile and never ceased his protest against the usurper. And finally in the Third Republic, when the iniquity against Dreyfus had been consummated and when public opinion was overwhelming in favor of accepting the verdict of the military court as settling the question absolutely and forever, a little group of the Intellectuals refused to take part in this conspiracy of silence. They declined to be satisfied with any solution of the difficulty which

was a betrayal of justice. It was the famous letter of Emile Zola, "I accuse," with its vigorous and vehement rhetoric, which rang forth as a clarion call to all those who held eternal right superior to temporary expediency. Nor was Zola alone in his attitude; Anatole France was not less resolute; and they were only two out of a host of the Intellectuals.

It is not often that a state is reduced to the pitiable condition depicted by Plato when its multitude is mad and when there is no one whose action in public matters is sound. The saving remnant may be very small; its members may be very few; and yet it is able to manifest itself and to make itself heard and to do what it can to counteract the contagion of hysteria which has captured the populace. It is not often that a nation is found to be without "honest followers of wisdom." It is not often—but it does happen on occasion; and it has happened recently. In the second decade of this century we had superabundant evidence that a great people had declined into this pitiable condition, despairingly described by Plato, a people whom we should have held to be almost immune from hysteria,—a people whom we should have believed to be more than adequately provided with a saving remnant of men who have tasted how sweet and blessed a possession is wisdom.

IV

If there ever was a moment in the history of a great nation when it had imperative need for a clear-thinking minority, stalwart in the faith however few in number, that moment arrived in Germany in the months which followed the outbreak of the war. Then, if ever, was the opportunity for the champions of German culture, for the Intellectuals of Germany, for the saving remnant, to render to their country a service of incalculable value. It was their chance to do for Germany in her hour of madness what the Intellectual leaders of France had done for their country in the fiery furor aroused by the Dreyfus affair. But there was not a single one of the high priests of German culture who had the courage to initiate the brave attitude of Zola when he flung "I accuse" in the face of those who were defending an indefensible wrong.

Not only did the Intellectuals of Germany fail to urge moderation upon their fellow-subjects and to use their influence to modify as far as might be the fierceness of popular feeling, stimulated by every possible governmental organization, but they allowed themselves to be cajoled or coerced into signing a manifesto of which

the sole effect in Germany itself was to intensify the spirit of hate. It was less than three months after the military party had plunged Europe into war that ninety-three philosophers and artists, men of letters and men of science sent forth their perfervid protest formally addressed "to the civilized world," in which they denounced "the lies and calumnies with which enemies are endeavoring to stain the honor of Germany in her hard struggle for existence, a struggle which has been forced upon her."

We do not know who was the actual writer of this manifesto with its declamatory rhetoric; but whoever he may have been, his fellow-signers made themselves responsible for his series of denials of things which the civilized world knew to be facts. Very likely it was the result of collaboration of several writers, uniting their efforts to make their unfounded assertions the more emphatic. They borrowed the device of repeating their negative "It is not true" from the affirmative "I accuse" of Zola's noble letter. But where the Frenchman had stood up alone in defence of what he believed to be right and in defiance of what seemed to be the overwhelming opinion of his fellow-citizens, the German Intellectuals enrolled themselves in a company of nearly a hundred to lend the weight of their reputations to a

series of assertions, which the majority of them ought to have known to be unfounded and false.

"It is not true," so they asserted, that the Germans were guilty of causing the war, that they had trespassed in neutral Belgium, that they had wantonly destroyed Louvain, that their warfare had violated international law, and that it was possible to make a distinction between German militarism and German civilization. And they ended their appeal to the civilized world with this demand: "Have faith in us! Believe that we shall carry on this war to the end as a civilized nation, to whom the legacy of a Goethe, a Beethoven, and a Kant is just as sacred as its own hearths and homes."

This last paragraph may have been meant either as a prophecy or as a promise; and in either case it has lamentably failed of performance. What would Goethe and Beethoven and Kant have thought of the sinking of the "Lusitania," of the massacre of the Armenians, of the deportation of the Belgians and of the murder of women and children by bombs dropt from Zeppelins upon unfortified towns?

Yet to this protest the signers pledged their names and their honor; and these signers bore the most honorable names in Germany, many of them enjoying a world-wide reputation. Among them were Brandl, Dörpfeld, Eucken,

Fulda, Haeckel, Harnack, Hauptmann, Hunperdinck, Ostwald, Roentgen, Sudermann, Willamovitz-Moellendorf and Wundt. Perhaps it is only fair to apportionate the blame between the artists and the scientists and to relieve the former of a little of the odium which the latter cannot escape. The men of letters, the dramatists, the musicians, may perhaps be a little more excusable for surrendering to the emotion of the moment, since their art is impossible without abundant feeling. Artists must possess emotion, even if they ought also to be dowered with intelligence. But what might be excused in men of letters is inexcusable in men of science, who do not need emotion and whose function it is to know,—and to know with absolute precision. It is the immitigable duty of the scientist to suppress his personal equation, to see the thing as it really is, and to report on it without exaggeration or diminution, and to assert nothing that he cannot prove. But here we find the chief German scientists, historians and physicists alike, making solemn asseverations about things which they had not scientifically investigated and as to which they had no secure knowledge. Their desertion dealt a deathblow to the reputation of German science; and this reputation was not wounded in the house of its enemies, it was assassinated by its friends.

It may be argued that these German Intellectuals made a superb self-sacrifice when they pledged their names and their honor to reckless misstatements and that they merely proffered their reputations as the German soldiers were risking their lives. If this was the motive of any of them, as it may very well have been, the sacrifice was in vain. When the Roman Curtius plunged into the fiery gulf, he knew in advance that his heroic deed would cause the gaping earth to close. But when these German Intellectuals flung their names and their honor into the chasm, it yawned only the wider.

Here is one obvious explanation of the pitiful plight in which Germany found herself a little later, without a single friend, except her vassal allies, and with the civilized world in arms against her. Her Intellectuals failed her in her hour of need; they did not stand forth as honest followers of wisdom; they allowed themselves to be drafted by the military machine as docilely as the cannon-fodder in the ranks of the regiments that invaded Belgium. And their dereliction from their duty dates further back, to the days long before the war when they made no effort, singly or collectively, to counteract the insidious megalomania which was dominating Germany. They did not combat this boastfulness; they took part in it. They led the shouting and the tumult of self-praise. They

thereby abdicated their leadership; and we need not wonder that when this megalomania resulted in war they banded themselves together to intensify the madness of the multitude.

These German leaders might be intellectual; but they were not intelligent. They might be professors of psychology; but they had little knowledge of human nature. They might be poets and playwrights; but they were deficient in understanding of the human heart. They were convinced, and they aided in convincing the populace, that the Germans were the chosen people, that they were the salt of the earth, that they were the elect of God, that they were supreme in all the arts and in all the sciences. Holding these convictions there was not one German Intellectual who was prepared to play the part of a Voltaire or a Hugo, a Lowell or an Arnold and to reiterate the unwelcome truths that a people needs to hear from its leaders. Even in the years of peace they had little self-respecting independence; and when war broke in all its horror they were unresistingly dragooned into the sacrifice of their reputations, their honor and the honor of German science

(1917.)

III

THE DWELLING OF A DAY-DREAM

III

THE DWELLING OF A DAY-DREAM

I

I ONCE asked an architectural critic what he thought of St. Patrick's cathedral in New York; and he shrugged his shoulders as he answered that it was blameless. "It possesses everything that a Gothic cathedral ought to have—except life! In fact, it can fairly be described as the definition of a Gothic cathedral." That is to say, it is a servile transcription, devoid of the freedom and the spontaneity, the originality and the individuality, which are the essential characteristics of the noble edifices it pretended to emulate. It is a translation, made by a man of ability, no doubt, but by a man who did not think in terms of Gothic art.

I do not venture even to guess what may have been my artistic friend's opinion of a French Renascence house which occupies a prominent position on the Riverside Drive. It is an uninspired conglomerate of several of the superb chateaux on the Loire, cabined, cribbed and confined in a single city block of two or

three acres. It stands revealed as a slavish transcript, without grace or charm or power. On the banks of the Loire it would be a poor thing; and on the banks of the Hudson it is a barren absurdity, out of place and out of time, a stark confession of architectural impotence.

Nor have I dared to inquire what my friend thought about a Tudor manor-house, which is conspicuous at Newport. It has been vaunted as a triumphant effort to recapture the Elizabethan largeness; and it might have seemed more attractive if it had been planted in the center of a spacious park, if it rose from stately terraces with century-old turf, and if it were approached by winding drives arched over by century-old oaks. But it is pitiably circumscribed in a scant half-dozen acres, in close proximity to a host of other country-places, many of them quite as out of keeping with the American climate and with American conditions. Since England is a land of cloudy skies and of frequent rain, an imitation of an Elizabethan dwelling could not have the sheltering verandas essential in the bold sunshine of our hot American summers. The Tudor mansions which this American dwelling aped had been properly adjusted to the climatic conditions of the British Isles, very northerly and made habitable only by the warmth of the Gulf Stream.

Moreover, if an Elizabethan residence is to be reproduced honestly, the American imitation must forego not only the veranda but also the carpets and the bath-rooms, unknown to the subjects of the Virgin Queen, who were accustomed to the strewing of their floors with rushes and to the free and frequent use of perfumes instead of bathing.

To build a Gothic cathedral over here or a French chateau or an Elizabethan manor-house, is akin to renouncing the use of our own language as it is spoken in our own time and in our own country. It is an attempt, foredoomed to failure, to speak a tongue not our own, the grammar of which has been acquired painfully and the idioms of which have to be apprehended as best we can. It is not unlike the unfortunate effort to write Greek plays in English,—a vain attempt to tell a story on the stage not in accord with the conditions of our snug twentieth century playhouses, roofed and lighted, but in conformity with what we believe we know about the conditions of the theater of Dionysus, several centuries before the Christian era, an immense open air amphitheater, stage-less and scenery-less.

It is a matter of common knowledge that the best Greek plays were written by the Greeks themselves; and they were satisfied with their

own methods of dramatic composition and did not shackle themselves by deference to any models which may have existed in earlier and alien civilizations. So the noblest Gothic cathedrals were erected by those to whom Gothic was vernacular; the finest French chateaux were constructed by the French themselves in the spacious days of the Renascence; and the stateliest Elizabethan mansions were built by the Elizabethans. If there is no hope of surpassing or even of equalling the originals why should we waste our energies in the futile endeavor to imitate the inimitable? After all, there are advantages in being your own contemporary and your own fellow-citizen; and Charles Lamb was not to be taken seriously when he cried, "Hang the age! I'll write for antiquity!" Altho he had nourished his style by loving study of his literary ancestors, the 'Essays of Elia' are not written in Wardour-street English.

There is the same unreality about all these architecture echoings that there is about the historical novel with its inevitably unsuccessful struggle to recapture the spirit of the past and with its equally unavoidable anachronisms. No one of us by taking thought can step off his own shadow; and no one of us can ever hope to put his clock back to any departed century. It is impossible to dispossess our-

selves of our accretions of knowledge and not to credit to the past more or less of the wisdom of the present. The fundamental falsity of the historical novel was never more flagrantly disclosed than in the German tale, wherein the soldier bade his wife farewell, with the explanation, that "I am now leaving you for the Seven Years War!"

"The effort to reproduce the peculiarities of antiquity," as Mr. Santayana has asserted, "is a proof that we are not its natural heirs, that we do not continue antiquity instinctively. People can mimic only what they have not absorbed. They reconstruct and turn into archaeological masquerade only what strikes them as outlandish. The genuine inheritors of a religion or an art never dream of reviving it; its antique accidents do not interest them, and its eternal substance they possess by nature."

II

INDEFENSIBLE as is the endeavor to import architecture "in the original package," it is not more absurd than the attempt to borrow decoration ready-made. In trying to transplant a French chateau or an English manor-house, there is evident the desire to have at least a dwelling of a single style, however unoriginal it

may be; but even more frequent of late in the United States than these homogeneous plagiarisms are the houses whose connecting rooms display a heterogeny of disparate and discordant elements each of them violently swearing at its neighbor. This is what is known as "period" furnishing and "period" decoration.

A room rigidly reproducing the stiff severity of the French Empire will open into another hung with the tapestries and filled with the furniture of the reign of Louis XIV; and this in turn may lead into a third where the decoration is Adam and where the chairs are Chippendale. A Byzantine entrance may conduct the visitor to a Gothic hall on his way to a Louis XVI drawing-room and to a George II dining room, opening out on a Spanish patio arranged as a conservatory or on an Egyptian tomb forced into service as a billiard-room. The bedrooms may be Japanese or Chinese, Hindu or Persian; and the only American room in the house is likely to be the kitchen,—unless perchance the headstrong owner has insisted on making this Pompeian or Assyrian.

Could anything be less artistic than this inconsistent medley of periods and of places? Could anything be more like an architectural crazy-quilt? Could anything be less homelike? How can anybody ever expect that his

household gods will settle down comfortably in so piebald an environment? How can any twentieth century American reconcile himself to taking up his residence in an atmosphere so alien and so unfriendly? How can he feel the warmth of his own hearth when he has condemned himself to dwell in the frigidity of a portfolio of sample-plates? The most that the owner of a dwelling so motley can do is to pride himself on the accuracy of the imitations he has purchased and to be vain over his own absence of originality.

There are those who hold that this devotion to the period-room is the abomination of desolation, but who are inclined to be more tolerant toward another method of despoiling the alien past to the profit of the American present,—the method applied with surpassing skill by the late Stanford White. He attempted no facile reproduction of the residence or the apartments of any one country or of any one epoch; but when he travelled in Europe he was ever on the lookout for the beautiful fittings of any of the eras when the art of the decorator was flourishing. He would purchase a superb marble mantelpiece in Florence, a splendidly elaborate pair of carved doors in Venice, a heavily beamed oak ceiling, with the panelling which accompanied it in Prague, and tapestries and embroidered

hangings, tables and chairs, sideboards and coffers, in whatever city he might visit. Then he designed a dwelling in a free adaptation of the formula of the palace of the Italian Renascence, proportioning a room to receive the panelling and the ceiling he had ravished from Bohemia and arranging the entrance hall so that it could be adorned by the marble mantelpiece and the carved doors of which he had despoiled Italy.

There is no denying that this process of lordly conquest enabled him to achieve a captivating sumptuousness. He had an instinctive understanding of the material means whereby he could get the utmost effect out of these accumulated spoils. He had taste and ingenuity; and he was a born decorator,—a belated but not unworthy descendant of the many-sided artists of the Italian Renascence. When he took the stalls of a sixteenth century church hidden in one of the forlorn hill-towns of Italy and transformed them adroitly into a bookcase for a twentieth century American residence, he was inspired so to provide all the other furnishings of the room that there would be a harmony of effect. The result did not correspond with any one period and there was no desire for pedantic consistency of style. A house designed and decorated by Stanford White was modern

in its way, for all its utilization of a variety of antiques. It was always brilliant; and it was often beautiful in its luxurious richness of color and of pattern. And, strange to say, it was not altogether un-American in its flamboyant expensiveness, since America has arrogated the right to consider itself as the heir of the ages.

Yet this incorporation of exotic elements into domestic decoration rarely arrived at complete assimilation; and now and again it stood confessed as little better than a litter of loot. Even when it was most successful it was open to the charge that it was more or less an attempt to get fine art ready-made; and we are all aware that the ready-made rarely fits as well as the made-to-order. White's method was not in accord with the practise of the great decorators in the days when decoration was greatest. It can scarcely be accepted as a step forward in our progress to an American art which shall be truly our own

III

"Modern architecture," so one of the foremost of American architects once declared, "should not be that of the illogical architect living in one age and choosing a style from another," whereby he is self-condemned to inferiority. And Mr. Hastings then pointed out that

we are modern in our dress and would not think "of wearing a Gothic robe or a Roman toga; but as individual as we might wish to be, we should still be inclined, with good taste, to dress according to the dictates of the day." He reminded us also that in each successive style in architecture and in decoration "there has always been a distinct spirit of contemporaneous life from which its root drew nourishment." And he outlined again the evolution of Roman architecture out of Greek, as the Latins demanded baths and bridges and basilicas; and in meeting these calls upon their craft the Roman architects modified the Greek forms until there had been evolved out of Greek a Roman architecture, which was the result of the new exigencies of the Latins themselves. More than a thousand years later the demands of the people of Italy brought about another evolution, that of Roman architecture into Renascence, a logical outgrowth which was attained only by the efforts of three generations of artists.

The architecture of the Italian Renascence had to be modified again to meet the different demands of the French when they had their Renascence a little later; and it had to be modified once more to adjust itself to the needs of the people of England, where the climate and the ideals of life were very different from those

of the French or of the Italians. Again there was an assimilation, an outgrowth, an evolution, until the result was English. Whistler might declare that Christopher Wren "had robbed St. Peter's to build St. Paul's," but none the less is the English cathedral English in its birth, even if its ancestry is alien. In their Palladian buildings the British were not so much borrowing the patterns of Palladio as they were continuing his tradition, conforming their practise to their own needs and their own desires. They scaled down the stately proportions of the palaces of the Italian princes to be commensurate with their own more modest necessities; and with little less of beauty the marble villa became the brick manor-house.

In due time the tradition of the Queen Anne and George I architects was transplanted to this side of the Atlantic and adjusted in turn to our American climate and ideals of life, conforming itself to our needs and desires. So it was that our ancestors more or less modified the Georgian customs; and the result of their independent handling of their artistic heritage was the outgrowth which we have chosen to call "Colonial." But the men who were responsible for Independence Hall and for Mount Vernon were only building as best they knew how in accordance with the spirit of their own time

and in obedience to its requirements. They never thought of style as something to be sought for second-hand, any more than the Italians had done in their day or the Romans or the Greeks in theirs. In fact, the artists of a great period of architecture and decoration have never thought of style. They never felt that they had any liberty of choice, since neither they nor their contemporaries knew any other way to work. None the less did they achieve an indigenous individuality; and it did not occur to them to make marauding raids upon a castle or church that had fallen on evil days or to bind themselves to a microscopic fidelity to the models which had inspired them.

These early American builders might use brick, imported from Holland or from England, or they might employ the timber of the primitive forest, in which case they had again to modify the method they were utilizing all unconscious that their new departures were leading them more than a little way from the patterns of their immediate predecessors. They made ample fireplaces for the huge logs which alone could warm these residences in our long winters; and they thrust out verandas which alone could provide the shelters grateful in our scorching summers. They relied on shingles and clapboards in default of stone and slate; and they made all

the other changes imposed by new conditions in a new world. They worked freely and spontaneously each in his own fashion and each profiting by his own individuality. They were speaking the only language they knew; and because it was their vernacular they were colloquially at ease in it and on occasion it encouraged them to be eloquent.

So long as the architect believes that "art stopped short in the cultivated court of the Empress Josephine," and so long as the decorator is willing to be a bond-slave to a "period," unable to call his soul his own, just so long will their misguided imitation result in stagnation and sterility. Their art will resemble the mule in that it will have no pride of ancestry and no hope of posterity. It may also reveal another likeness to the mule, in that it is obstinate in refusing to go forward.

A family whose residence is a decorative grab-bag, even if the furniture consists only of "museum-pieces," must feel more or less as tho it had taken up its abode in a curiosity-shop, the atmosphere of which is chill and inhospitable. Such a dwelling must always remain icily impersonal; it cannot "adapt itself to its occupants" as Lowell in one of his letters asserted that a home always did, if it was truly a home. Its inmates can hardly help

looking upon themselves as transients, restrained from capricious desertion by no clinging tentacles of affection for their own handiwork. They have had little or nothing to do with its making; and they need not care what becomes of it, when they depart and surrender it to others who will be equally unable to take root.

IV

We have all of us our day-dreams; and it is one of mine that if I were a multi-millionaire, still in the prime of life and fortunate in a wife who was a helpmate and in half-a-dozen sons and daughters who might gather about the hearth of an evening, I would build a house for myself that should be truly a home, "adapted to its occupants," made for us and for no one else, fit for a family to grow up in and to leave with regret and to return to with unfailing joy. Moreover, it should be a dwelling at once contemporary and American, with nothing antique or imitated, and with nothing alien or exotic. It should be the product of America today, a genuine effort to represent our country and our time, an expression of the very best that an American architect could do with the aid of the foremost of our painters and sculptors.

If the house of my day-dream could be com-

sky-scraper; but at least it need not be an empty copy of a palace or a chateau or a manor-house. Of course, it would have to be a modification of the so-called "Colonial" house, adapted by our ancestors in the days before the Revolution from the eighteenth century houses of the mother-country.

What we call "Colonial" was borrowed from England as England had borrowed it originally from Italy; but we have made it our own in the course of seven score years and more. It is now vernacular; we speak it naturally; we think in it; and therefore we can use it without regard to any standard existing elsewhere—excepting always the abiding standards of fitness and taste. The house I have in my mind's eye might be of wood or of marble; but I like best to vision it as of brick, ever a satisfying material for a home. It would have steel beams, unknown to our ancestors, because these permit the architect to get results difficult or impossible when he is limited to wood. It would be absolutely fireproof, again of course, because I want it to survive as a home, generation after generation. It must be built by honest craftsmen, interested each of them in his work and each of them doing his best for sheer joy in his job.

The decorations, the hangings, the wall-papers,

the lighting fixtures, the door-knobs, the fire-irons, the furniture, the floor-coverings should all be American, and contemporary; and since in my dream I have no need to consider the question of cost, these accompaniments, whenever they could not be found in the open market, should be especially designed by the best available American artists. For example the marble mantelpieces that might be needed would not be ravished from a Venetian palace, but modelled by the most gifted American sculptors of our day. For my fireplaces there are available already firebacks designed by Elihu Vedder. If tapestries were required for doors and windows and walls the cartoons would be entrusted to a mural painter of distinction with the suggestion that he should avail himself of American themes and of motives from our native flora and fauna; and the stuffs themselves should be woven on American looms. And the coverings, stamped leather or embroidered textiles, should also be the result of the loving labor of American artisan-artists.

The furniture also should be American, in harmony with the architecture and therefore inspired more or less by the English models which our forebears brought over with them. But these models would not be baldly imitated; they would serve only as suggestions for the

furniture called for by our latter-day liking for comfort and even for luxury. If this furniture, found in the market-place as it might be, or specially designed as it might have to be, proved to be harmonious with the house it was to help become a home, it would somehow reveal itself as adequately American, even if it avoided all wilful effort at needless originality. I have seen in more than one New York club-house furniture bold in its lines and yet unobtrusive, fit for its social use, wholly unpretentious, not consciously of any "period"—except our own. In the furniture, as in all the other adornments of my dream-dwelling, and as in the house itself, the artists would feel at liberty to profit by the best that the past has bequeathed to us, but they would not be bound or circumscribed by a false fidelity to any of their predecessors.

And when this residence for the multi-millionaire, which I am not, may arise in actual brick and steel and slate, and when it may find itself roofed at last, finished within and without, and furnished in absolute fitness, it would be a "period" house,—but the period would be now and here, New York in the twentieth century; and if it should chance to survive to later centuries it would show them the best that we can do when we set out to build a house—just

as the Italian palace survives, the French chateau and the English manor-house. It might not be the equal of any one of these masterpieces of the past; but it would be the result of an endeavor akin to that which had called them into being.

This dwelling of my day-dream is only a cloud-capped tower and I know that I may not live to see it translated into fact, even for some other home-maker. But as Thoreau assured us, "If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them." And this is the pleasant task I suggest to someone else.

(1917.)

IV

WHAT IS AMERICAN LITERATURE?

IV

WHAT IS AMERICAN LITERATURE?

I

IT was in the ninth decade of the nineteenth century that a British historian of the expansion of the British race proclaimed boldly the permanent unity of the several peoples who have English for their mother-tongue despite whatever political severance may have taken place. When John Richard Green came to record the revolt of the American colonies from British rule and the establishment of the independence of the United States he asserted that since 1776 "the life of the English people has flowed not in one current, but in two; and while the older has shown little sign of lessening, the younger has fast risen to a greatness which has changed the face of the world. In wealth and material energy, as in numbers, it far surpasses the mother-country from which it sprang. It is already the main branch of the English people; and in the days that are at hand the main current of that people's history must run along the channel, not of the Thames or the Mersey, but of the Hudson and the Mississippi."

If an American had penned this eloquent paragraph, he would have laid himself open to the charge of boastfulness; and even when an American merely quotes it, he has the uneasy feeling that he may be indulging in a specimen of that vainglorious "tall talk" which was once unduly prevalent in the juvenile United States. Yet it is well that the facts in the case should be stated thus clearly by a British author of high authority, for these facts are often forgotten or at least overlooked by other men of letters both British and American. It is useful, and indeed it is needful, for us all on both sides of the Atlantic to be reminded now and again that the people of the British Isles and the immense majority of the people of the United States come of the same stocks, speak the same language, and possess in common the same literature.

By the aid of an association of scholars, mainly British but occasionally American, the long story of the development of English literature in the British Isles has been narrated in detail in the fourteen volumes of the Cambridge History; and now there have been added four volumes setting forth the far briefer story of its development in the United States. These four additional volumes deal exclusively with that subdivision of English literature which is natu-

rally and necessarily known as American literature, but which in spite of its separatist name is none the less an integral part of English literature not to be omitted from any attempt at a comprehensive survey of the whole.

Unfortunately more than one American historian of the later literature which has come into being in the United States and more than one British historian of the earlier literature which was born in the British Isles, have chosen to deal with these unequal portions of English literature as tho they were each of them self-contained entities in no wise related to one another, thus apparently setting what must be termed American literature in opposition to English literature, of which it is only a subdivision. Yet to detach American literature from English literature is to deny the essential unity of the literature of our language.

II

It ought to be obvious that the literature of any language is one and indivisible. It ought therefore to be indisputable that no book of recognized literary merit, no book in which we discover the twin qualities of style and of substance, can fairly be omitted from any complete consideration of the literature of the language

in which it was composed, regardless of the nativity or the citizenship of its author or of any political separation which may have taken place between the several peoples who possess that language in common. It is an unfortunate fact, however, that now and again we do find American books and American authors omitted from histories of English literature, altho we fail to find any corresponding exclusion in the histories of any other literature, even when the circumstances seem to be similar, not to say identical.

For example, no historian of Greek literature has ever ventured to pass over Theocritus, altho that Syracusan idyllist owed no allegiance to any Greek state, and altho he may never have set foot on the soil of Greece; and no historian of French literature has ever hesitated to consider the work and the influence of Madame de Staël, who was Swiss by birth, who was Scandinavian by marriage, and who was long exiled from France. For these historians of Greek and of French literature it was sufficient that Theocritus wrote in Greek and that Madame de Staël wrote in French. The alien Theocritus may be solitary in Greek literature, but the alien Madame de Staël has a host of parallels in French literature.

Every historian of the development of literary

art in France discusses in turn Saint Francis de Sales, who was a subject of Savoy and who refused to become a Frenchman, the Scot Anthony Hamilton, the Swiss Rousseau, the German Grimm and the Italian Galiani. When the author of a manual of French literature comes to the nineteenth century he pays attention, proportionate to their individual importance, to the writings of the brothers de Maistre, who were born in Savoy, of M. Maurice Maeterlinck who was born in Belgium, of Louis Fréchette who was born in Canada and of M. Vielé-Griffin who was born in the United States. Moreover, Petit de Julleville and Brunetière were led logically by this inclusion of alien authors who wrote French to the exclusion of French authors who wrote only in Latin, Abelard and Saint Bernard, de Thou, Scaliger and Casaubon. It is perhaps even more significant that the new 'Library of Spanish Authors' comprehends only writers of Castilian "including, of course, those born in the Spanish-American republics," and yet excluding the native Spaniards who wrote in Catalan.

In spite of the admirable example thus set by these foreign scholars who recognize the essential unity of the literature of any language, it is not unusual to find British historians of English literature who bestow ample space upon the

French poems of Chaucer and the Latin poems of Milton, and yet who deny any consideration to the essays of Emerson, the romances of Hawthorne, and the poetry of Poe and Whitman composed in the English language, the mother-tongue of Whitman and Poe, of Hawthorne and Emerson, as it was the mother-tongue of Milton and of Chaucer.

III

PROBABLY the explanation of these occasional departures from the precedent accepted as imperative by the historians of every other literature must be sought in the unprecedented relation of the United States to Great Britain. For the first time in the world's history a group of colonies having achieved its independence of the mother country and having organized itself into a separate nation, has gone on its own way and followed its own destiny until at last its population has come to outnumber that of the parent islands two to one. And this immense increase of population in the United States has not been derived exclusively from the British Isles or even from the kindred stocks out of which the British population was originally recruited. As a result of this development and of this divergence the Americans and the British are at once alike and unlike; and perhaps both parties are more acutely conscious of the points

of dissimilarity than of the points of similarity. The inhabitants of Great Britain and the inhabitants of the United States know themselves to be the same and yet not the same. They are the same in that the Americans have inherited the language, the laws and the political ideals which the British had earlier evolved. They are not the same in that the Americans, having governed themselves for now nearly a century and a half, have had to solve their own problems in their own fashion in their own continent, while the British in their group of islands have acquired a mighty empire and have had to confront difficulties very different from those which rose before their former colonists.

As a result of these dissimilar necessities the British and the Americans have developed each in their own direction and they have grown apart in spite of their retention of a common language and of the common law. They are two great nations, rivals in discovery and invention, rivals in the arts, rivals in commerce and in finance. They are friendly rivals, no doubt, and they do not feel that latent hostility toward each other which they may feel toward those who speak foreign tongues; there has been a hundred years of peace between them; and another war is unthinkable. None the less is each of them acutely conscious of its own independent nationality and jealous of its own indi-

viduality. It is small wonder, then, that writers on one side of the Atlantic or on the other lacking in insight into fundamental facts, should sometimes be tempted to segregate American literature and to set it apart by itself. We may even doubt whether the historians of French literature would have been so unhesitatingly cordial to the Swiss and to the Belgian authors who had French for their sole means of communicating with the rest of the world, if Switzerland now surpassed France in population and if Belgium now exceeded it in power.

While the Americans of today are still English in many ways they are in no wise British; and even the original immigrants, Cavaliers in Virginia and Pilgrims in Massachusetts, right Elizabethans as they were, suffered a sea change speedily and became subdued to what they lived in. Nevertheless from the very beginning they held fast to their birthright in the English law, in the English language and in English literature. To these traditions they were ever loyal; and even when they rose against the agents of the British King, they held themselves children of Chaucer, subjects of Shakspere, heirs of Milton. Even tho they dwell under alien skies, with the thousand leagues of the Western Ocean between the broad new land and the old island home of the race, they have always claimed Chaucer and Shakspere and Milton as theirs by

heritage, denying any assertion of primogeniture which might disinherit them. They have had a stalwart satisfaction in their ownership of English literature as a whole; and their descendants of today refuse sturdily to be put off with a younger brother's portion.

IV

WHILE we Americans have ever gloried in our inheritance of English literature we have also had a natural pride in our own authors and in that native literature which began tentatively in the eighteenth century, which revealed itself more amply in the nineteenth, and which possesses unknown possibilities of expansion in the twentieth. When Matthew Arnold suggested to Sainte-Beuve that Lamartine was not an important poet, the wise French critic replied, "He is important to us." Certain American poets and certain American prosemasters are important to us Americans, even if we are well aware that they may be less important to our kin across the sea. Tho they may fail to prove their ultimate significance when measured by the universal and permanent standards, none the less they have special significance for us, whose struggles they have recorded and whose hopes they have shared. "Every race," said Brunetière in his history of

French literature, "is the judge,—and must be the only judge—of its own poets." Thus it is that Racine and Lamartine, for example, are justifiably rated far higher by their own countrymen than would be warranted by a truly cosmopolitan examination of their works.

To hold the scales even and to weigh the American men of letters, one after another, with the weights which have international validity, is a task as delicate as it is difficult. Yet it is a little less difficult today—even if it is not less delicate—than it was a century ago, when Sydney Smith was asking "Who reads an American book?" Previous to the appearance of the 'Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon' and of the 'Spy,' the accepted belief that a great nation ought to have great poets, and that the United States ought to be endowed at once with a literature commensurate with the expanse of the country, had lured more than one native bard, possest of aspiration rather than inspiration, into the concoction of ponderous epics, to be read by title only.

This was a manifestation of provincialism, of the desire of a locality on the circumference to demand equality with the spot in the center of things. Provincialism may be defined as an uneasy self-assertion supported by faith but not justified by works. It was painfully

prevalent in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century; and it was sharply satirized by Lowell in an often quoted passage of the 'Fable for Critics':

Why, there's scarcely a huddle of log-huts and shanties
That has not brought forth its Miltons and Dantes:
I myself know ten Byrons, one Coleridge, three Shelleys,
Two Raphaels, six Titians (I think), one Apelles.
Leonardos and Rubenses plenty as lichens;
One (but that one is plenty) American Dickens,
A whole pack of Lambs, any number of Tennysons;
In short, if a man has the luck to have any sons
He may feel pretty certain that one out of twain
Will be some very great person over again.

And in these same earlier decades of the last century there was to be observed by the side of the self-assertion of provincialism the self-abasing attitude of colonialism, of the inability to see our own except thru spectacles belonging to British critics. Colonialism may be defined as a timid deference to the opinion of the mother country and as a blank disbelief that anything good can come out of our own. Lowell, tho he did not call it by name, could not fail to perceive this colonialism as clearly as he saw the provincialism; and he hit at it in his contemptuous dismissal of the writing that

suits each whisper and motion
To what will be thought of it over the ocean.

V

Now, at last, in these opening decades of the twentieth century it is possible for native historians of the American branch of English literature to discuss it, if not with absolute detachment, at least dispassionately, avoiding alike the arrogance of provincialism and the humility of colonialism. The task is not easy even now, because the expansion of literature is relatively so recent in the United States, that we shall lack yet awhile the perspective of time, which is unerring in assigning the exalted positions to the authors of most importance and of most significance. By holding fast to cosmopolitan standards we may save ourselves any temptation to take a native goose for a Swan of Avon and to liken our mocking-birds to the alien nightingale. There is not likely to be any lamentable failure of justice, if the several contributors to a record of the development of English literature here in the United States strive honestly to ascertain the exact position of our leading authors, first of all in American literature itself, second in English literature as a whole, and thirdly and finally in the larger literature of the world, present and past.

Thirty years ago the distinguished Spanish

scholar who had been representing his native land at Washington, paused in New York on his way home and wrote a prefatory note to the American translation of his delightful novel, 'Pepita Ximenez.' In this suggestive and stimulating letter of introduction to the American reading public, the Spanish author-diplomat took occasion to insist upon the essential unity of the literature of any language and to dwell upon the necessary recognition of American literature as an integral part of English literature. Yet he paid us the compliment of remarking that we Americans had brought to the common fund of the English-speaking peoples and to the culture of the race "rich elements, fine traits of character, and perhaps even higher qualities." He hoped for a favorable reception of his translated tale, because he had observed in "this American literature, of English origin and language, a certain largeness of view, a certain cosmopolitanism and affectionate comprehension of what is foreign, which is as broad as the continent that the Americans inhabit and which forms a contrast to the narrow exclusiveness of the insular British."

It must be noted that Don Juan Valera had earlier warned us that it was a delusion of national vanity to believe that there is or ever will be, "anything that with legitimate and can-

did independence may be called American literature." And then he made clear his precise meaning:

Greece diffused herself throughout the world in flourishing colonies, founded powerful states in Egypt, in Syria, and even in Bactriana, among peoples who, unlike the American Indians, possessed a high civilisation of their own. But, notwithstanding this dispersion and this political severance from the mother-country, the literature of Syracuse, of Antioch and of Alexandria, was as much Greek literature as was the literature of Athens. For the same reason the literature of New York and Boston will continue to be as much English literature as the literature of London and Edinburgh; the literature of Mexico and Buenos Ayres will continue to be as much Spanish literature as the literature of Madrid; the literature of Rio Janeiro will be as much Portuguese literature as the literature of Lisbon. Political union may be severed, but, between peoples of the same tongue and of the same race, the ties of spiritual fraternity are indissoluble, so long as their common civilisation lasts. There are immortal kings or emperors who reign and rule in America by true divine right and against whom no Washington or Bolivar shall prevail and from whom no Franklin can snatch the sceptre. These tyrants are named Cervantes, Shakspere and Camoens.

(1916.)

V

THE CENTENARY OF A QUESTION

V

THE CENTENARY OF A QUESTION

I

IT is exactly a hundred years ago this month since Sydney Smith asked "Who reads an American book?" This struck most Americans of 1820 as a most insulting question. It immediately aroused a riot of angry answers from all sorts and conditions of men; and it has unceasingly reverberated through the columns of our literary periodicals in every year of all the hundred since it was originally uttered.

But after a century, "the tumult and the shouting dies"; and it ought to be possible for an American of 1920 to consider this famous query with disinterestedness if not with detachment. It may even be profitable, now that there have been more than five score years of peace between us and our kin across the sea, to consider this query calmly in order to discover all the circumstances of its asking, and even to inquire honestly whether there may not have been at least a little justification for it.

Sydney Smith edited the first number of the

Edinburgh Review in 1802; he had proposed this periodical as an organ for the group of young men who were keenly dissatisfied with the complacent Toryism which defended a heterogeny of old abuses; and he continued to be a constant contributor to its liberalizing pages for a quarter of a century, in spite of his exile to a remote Yorkshire parish. So vigorous were the assaults of the *Edinburgh* on these abuses that the *Quarterly Review* was soon founded by the stern and unbending Tories in order that "the Whig dogs should not have the best of it"—to borrow Dr. Johnson's characteristic phrase. From its beginning the *Quarterly* took a most offensive attitude toward America and often exploded in violent vituperation; and from its beginning the *Edinburgh* had been far more friendly toward us, as might have been expected from a review started by young and ardent reformers who could not fail to recognize that many of the political improvements they were advocating in Great Britain had already been obtained in the United States.

In the *Edinburgh Review* for January 1920 there is a criticism of Adam Seybert's 'Statistical Annals of the United States,' published in Philadelphia in 1818. It was unsigned, like all the other articles, in accord with the custom that contributions to periodicals should be anon-

ymous; but we now know that it was written by Sydney Smith. It extends to only eleven pages, ten of which are devoted to an abstract of the mass of facts and figures in Seybert's quarto. The tone of the reviewer was benevolent; and it was with kindly appreciation that he transcribed the record of American expansion and prosperity. It was with brotherly sympathy that he warned us that the inevitable consequences of a nation's fondness for martial glory are "taxes upon every article which enters into the mouth, or covers the back, or is placed under foot—taxes upon everything which it is pleasant to see, hear, feel, smell or taste—taxes on everything on earth, and the waters under the earth."

It is not too much to say that the friendliness of the first ten pages of this criticism is really remarkable when we recall that it was written less than five years after the termination of what we call the "War of 1812" and after the defeat of the British in the battle of New Orleans. Only on the eleventh and last page of Sydney Smith's paper could the most thin-skinned of perfervid patriots find anything in any way offensive to our national susceptibility. The sting was in the tail of it,—in the concluding paragraphs wherein we Americans were warned not to allow ourselves to be persuaded

by orators or newspapers into the belief that we were "the greatest, the most refined, the most enlightened and the most moral people on earth," and in which we were told that the effect of this journalistic boasting upon a European was "unspeakably ludicrous," for altho "the Americans are a brave, industrious and acute people," they had hitherto "given no indications of genius."

This general statement was almost immediately supported by the specific allegation that during our forty years of independence, we had "done absolutely nothing for the sciences, for the arts, for literature, or even for the statesman-like studies of politics or political economy." Then Sydney Smith called the bede-roll of the orators, scientists, theologians, scholars, poets, actors and artists who had illumined the same two score years in Great Britain; whereupon he asked if there were American parallels to these British worthies. This inquiry was followed by that rattling volley of pointed questions which has come echoing down the corridors of time:

> In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture or statue? What does the world yet owe to American physicians or surgeons? What new substances have their chemists discovered?

or what old ones have they analized? What new constellations have been discovered by the telescopes of Americans? What have they done in mathematics? Who drinks out of American glasses? or eats from American plates? or sleeps in American blankets?

And the paper concluded with the remark that Americans would do well to keep clear of superlatives of self-praise until these questions were "fairly and favorably answered."

II

If this battery of pertinent queries were to be fired point-blank at the Americans of 1920, we should not wince, for we could very well leave to others the finding of full and favorable answers. But when it was discharged in 1820, we were bitterly annoyed. Our national vanity was painfully wounded,—that national vanity which was then unduly inflated, because it was distended rather by our etherial hopes for the future than sustained by our solid accomplishments in the past. We were swollen with pride in what we were going to do; we were uneasily conscious of our manifest destiny; and we were inclined to be vocal in flaunting our virtues,—even if we did not actually assert that we were "the greatest, the most refined, the most enlightened, and the most moral people on earth."

The period of our history from the adoption

of the Constitution in 1789 to the year when Sydney Smith punctured our complacency with his saw-toothed interrogatory, is not a period upon which we can today look back with complete satisfaction. It was an epoch of jangling party strife, of occasional rebellion and of threatened secession. It was an era of geographical expansion, and of intermittent prosperity. We were spreading abroad toward the South and the West; we were sending our ships to all the ports of all the seven seas; and we were beginning to manufacture most of the things we needed. The airy hopes of a hundred years ago have been more or less justified in the course of the century; but these early aspirations were only too often expressed in material terms, in the statistics of commerce, in the balance of trade, in dollars and cents. We looked forward to mere bigness of the body politic rather than to true greatness of the soul.

It cannot have been on a day very far distant from that of Sydney Smith's question when John Quincy Adams made a speech at New Bedford, in which he reckoned the number of whale-ships sailing out of the port and compared it with that of an earlier year, taking this as a type of American success. Lowell, from whom I borrow the illustration, made the apt comment that it is "with quite another oil that

those far-shining lamps of a nation's true glory, which burn forever, must be filled. It is not by any amount of material splendor or prosperity, but only by moral greatness, by ideas, by works of imagination that a race can conquer the future. . . . Of Carthage, whose merchant-fleets furled their sails in every port of the known world, nothing is left but the deeds of Hannibal. . . . But how large is the space occupied in the maps of the soul by little Athens! It was great by the soul, and its vital force is as indestructible as the soul."

Now, in 1920, we have good reason to believe that we possess sufficient of this vital force to save our soul, since after "drugged and doubting years" we came at last into the world-war in defense of civilization. But what was our state in 1820? That we possessed this vital force a hundred years ago is only a hypothesis, supported by meager evidence. We can afford to be honest with ourselves today; and if we have the courage to look the fact in the face we must confess that our forefathers of a century ago could not answer Sydney Smith's question fairly and favorably. In fact, one reason why this sharp thrust caused us such acute suffering was that we could not parry it and that it went home.

Whatever may be the case in 1920 there is

no denying that in 1820 nobody was going to an American play, or looking at an American statue or picture. Our physicians and surgeons had done nothing to relieve human suffering; our astronomers had discovered no new constellations and our chemists no new substances. It is true that if Sydney Smith had asked for our inventions as well as for our discoveries, we could have put in an answer and called attention to the lightning-rod, to the cotton-gin and to the steam-boat,—and even to the torpedo and to the submarine, although none of us could have foreseen to what devilish use these devices would be put in the course of time. And it is true also that we could bring forward the 'Federalist' as a statesman-like study of politics; but Sydney Smith was not a prophet and he could not foresee the influence which Alexander Hamilton was to exert upon the founders of the Australian and South African federations.

If we continue to be honest we shall have to admit that our forefathers would have been hard put to find a fair and favorable answer, because the books of American authorship which had been published before he insisted on this exacerbating question and which are read today by other than professed students of our literary history, are very few indeed. No one of us is now ashamed to acknowledge that he is not

familiar with Joel Barlow's 'Columbiad' or with Timothy Dwight's 'Conquest of Canaan,' those magniloquent epics deliberately composed to supply a mighty nation with poems commensurate with its magnitude.

There is the 'Federalist,' but that had served its immediate purpose and not even here in the United States did anybody suspect that it was to be revered as a permanent storehouse of political wisdom. There was Franklin's 'Autobiography,' but this was not printed from his own manuscript until 1868, altho a truncated French translation had been published in Paris in 1791, from which an English version had been made about a score of years later. Irving's 'Knickerbocker' had been published in 1809, but eleven years later it had not yet been republished in England; and altho a few copies of it had crossed the Atlantic, Sydney Smith could not fairly be charged with knowledge of its existence. Irving's 'Sketch-Book' began to be issued in New York in parts in 1819, but the last of these did not appear until 1820, when the complete book was republished in London, where it was cordially received,—the *Edinburgh Review* for August 1820 containing a most friendly criticism. The first collection of Bryant's poems did not appear until 1821, when Irving was instrumental in arranging for a

British edition. And it was also in 1820 that Fenimore Cooper published the 'Spy,' to be followed in the next five years by the 'Pilot' and by the 'Last of the Mohicans.'

Thus we perceive that when Sydney Smith asked his question American literature was just about to be born; and that if he had asked it five or ten years later there would have been no difficulty in supplying the fair and favorable answer. What we need to see clearly is that American literature had not really come into being in 1820, however lustily it was to stretch its infant limbs in the decade immediately following.

III

THE first thirty-seven years of our independence, from 1783 to 1820, were years of literary penury; and they stand in startling contrast with the literary wealth which had been accumulated in Great Britain during this period, which was the epoch of the Romantic Revival. It was the era of a fresh outflowering of English poetry, high-colored and full-blooded, startlingly different from the paler prose which had been the product of the first three quarters of the eighteenth century. The Kilmarnock collection of Burns had appeared in 1786 and the 'Lyrical Ballads' of Wordsworth and Coleridge

in 1798. Scott's 'Lay of the Last Minstrel' had come out in 1805, Coleridge's 'Christabel' in 1806, and Wordsworth's poems in 1807. Byron's 'Childe Harold' began to appear in 1812; Shelley's 'Queen Mab' was issued in 1813; and the poems of Keats were published in 1817.

Perhaps Sydney Smith would have been kinder if he had refrained from the infliction of futile anguish upon his American friends; but it ought to be evident now that he had good warrant for the question he asked. It was pointed, but it was also to the point. He may have been ungenerous, but he was not unjust. He may have been moved not by playful malice, but rather by an honest desire to make us see ourselves as others saw us. He may very well have believed himself to be not a foe stabbing at a helpless victim, but a friend wielding a scalpel which would relieve us of the tumor of vainglory.

I make this suggestion,—irenic rather than ironic—with the more confidence because there is in the very next number of the *Edinburgh Review*, that for April 1820, an article which must have been written by Sydney Smith and which testifies to the honest desire of the English liberals to keep on the best of terms with the young republic on the far side of the Western

Ocean. It is a review of an American book published in Philadelphia in 1819, written by a certain Robert Walsh (otherwise unknown to fame), and entitled 'An Appeal from the Judgements of Great Britain respecting the United States of America.' I have never seen the book itself, but from Sydney Smith's frequent and abundant quotations, it appears to have been a heated protest against the British writers who were then engaged in virulent disparagement of America. These writers were most of them Tories of the strictest sect; and they vented their venom on us month after month in *Blackwood's* and quarter after quarter in the *Quarterly*.

What Sydney Smith sought to accomplish in this review of this book was to convince Americans that this malignant torrent flowed only from Tory pens and that it had never disgraced the pages of the *Edinburgh Review*. He called attention to the fact that the *Edinburgh* itself had come in for its portion of the abuse which the author of 'An Appeal' seemed "to think reserved exclusively for America,—and, what is a little remarkable, for being too much her advocate." He insisted that the *Edinburgh* had "spoken far more good of America than ill—that in nine cases out of ten, where we have mentioned her, it has been for praise—and in all

that is essential or of serious importance, we have spoken nothing but good;—while our censures have been wholly confined to matters of inferior note, and generally accompanied with an apology for their existence, and a prediction of their speedy disappearance." He quoted a passage from an article in an early number of the *Edinburgh* in which the assertion was made that "the Americans had shown an abundance of talent, wherever inducements had been held out for its exertion; that their party pamphlets were written with great keenness and spirit; and that their orators frequently displayed a vehemence, correctness and animation, that would win the admiration of any European audience."

And in his final paragraph he declared that his article may contain things requiring explanation and things liable to misconstruction; but nevertheless "the spirit in which it is written, however, cannot, we think, be misunderstood. We cannot descend to little cavils and altercations; and have no leisure to maintain a controversy about words and phrases. We have an unfeigned respect for the free people of America; and we mean honestly to pledge ourselves for that of the better part of this country." Surely this is frank and manly and straightforward, as Sydney Smith was himself.

Surely there is nothing here to offend the susceptibilities of the most sensitive and most thin-skinned of Americans.

On any unprejudiced survey we must exonerate Sydney Smith and the *Edinburgh Review* of a century ago from any ill will toward the United States and from any sympathy with the Tory attacks upon us. That these assaults were incessant not only in 1820, but for the following fifty years, all Americans are aware. That they did immeasurable mischief is notorious; and it is also probable that they were in part responsible for the occasional dislike of Great Britain which was unfortunately disclosed when we at last decided to enter the Great War in alliance with the nation with which we had waged the War of Independence and the War of 1812. Bismarck was never shrewder than when he pointed out that "every country is held at some time to account for the windows broken by its press; the bill is presented, some day or other, in the form of hostile sentiment in the other country." And this hostile sentiment has often proved itself to be the most potent of those "imponderables" which Bismarck always valued highly.

It is interesting to note that Washington Irving had in effect anticipated this pregnant remark of Bismarck's. In one of the earliest

of the numbers in which the 'Sketch-Book' began to appear in 1819, there is a paper entitled 'English Writers on America,' which opens with a significant sentence: "It is with feelings of deep regret that I observe the literary animosity daily growing up between England and America." That Irving himself had been bitterly aggrieved by the abuse lavished on the United States by the *Quarterly Review* was shown two or three years later after the 'Sketch-Book' had established his reputation; he declined an offer of a hundred pounds for a contribution to the *Quarterly*. He was in sore need of money, but he felt that it would be unworthy in him to appear in the pages of a periodical which had shown itself unscrupulously malignant toward his country.

While the opening sentence of his friendly essay is significant, as I have pointed out, perhaps a later passage is even more deserving of quotation here:

> Possessing, as England does, the fountain-head whence the literature of the language flows, how completely is it in her power, and how truly is it her duty, to make it a medium of amiable and magnanimous feeling—a stream where the two nations might meet together, and drink in peace and kindness. Should she, however, persist in turning it to waters of bitterness, the time may come when she may repent of her folly. . . . She may look back with regret at her

infatuation, in repulsing from her side a nation she might have grappled to her bosom, and thus destroying her only chance for real friendship beyond the boundaries of her own dominion.

(January, 1920.)

VI

AMERICAN APHORISMS

VI

AMERICAN APHORISMS

I

AT the beginning of an address which Lord Morley delivered before the Edinburgh Philosophical Institute nearly thirty years ago he told his hearers that he had often been asked for a list of the hundred best books and that he had once been requested to supply by return of post the names of the three best books in the world. "Both the hundred and the three are a task far too high for me," he confessed, and then he declared that he would prefer to indicate what is "one of the things best worth hunting for in books,"—the wisdom which has compacted itself into the proverb, the maxim, the aphorism, the pregnant sentence inspired by "common sense in an uncommon degree." Lord Morley asserted that the essence of the aphorism is "the compression of a mass of thought and observation into a single saying"; and he added that it ought "to be neither enigmatical nor flat, neither a truism on the one hand, nor a riddle on the other."

The lecturer did not provide a definition of the lofty aphorism which should serve to distinguish it from the humbler proverb; and yet the distinction is perhaps contained in this last quotation, since the democratic proverb tends toward the truism whereas the more aristocratic aphorism inclines toward the enigma. Lord John Russell once called a proverb "All men's wisdom and one man's wit"; and proverbial wisdom appeals at once to the mass of mankind, whereas the less universal truth packed into the subtler aphorism is likely to demand a little time for consideration before it can win its welcome. In fact, the more keenly the maker of an aphorism has peered into the inner recesses of human nature, the less likely is his maxim to attain immediate acceptance from the multitude, who are optimistically content to see only the surface of life and who prefer not to probe too deeply into the fundamental egotism of man. So it is that the swift apprehension of some of the shrewdest of La Rochefoucauld's sayings might almost be made to serve as a test both of the intelligence and of the knowledge of the labyrinthian intricacies of the human soul.

We may easily find ourselves quarreling over the veracity of an aphorism, whereas a proverb is almost indisputable; it proves itself as simply

and as instantly as the assertion that two and two make four. This immediate obviousness of a proverb does not prevent it from being irreconcilable with another proverb stating the equally obvious opposite. "Penny-wise and pound-foolish" may seem to contradict "take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves." But after all the contradiction is only apparent, since it needs both of these sayings to contain the whole truth that we must be careful in little things, no doubt, but we must also be able to discern boldly the moment when little things must be sacrificed for great things. More than one humorist has seen fit to poke fun at this peculiarity of proverbial wisdom, without any impairment of the authority of either of the contradictory assertions.

The maxim we may trace to its source and tag with the name of its maker, but the proverb is not individual even if it must have been minted by some one man. "Penny-wise and pound-foolish" might have been uttered in any age; and it is only the modern expression for a rule of conduct inherited from the remotest past. An equivalent phrase must have been uttered soon after the development of articulate speech; and we may be assured that it was almost as familiar to the cave-dwellers as it is to us. It did not have to be transmitted by in-

heritance from the dead languages to the living; it sprang into being by spontaneous generation in every tongue, ancient and modern. By the very fact that it is of universal validity, and therefore of universal utility, it is to be found in every land, in every language and in every age.

The maxim, on the other hand, is more frankly individual; it is due not to the wisdom of the many but only to the penetrating wit of one; and therefore it is often racial, revealing the tongue and the time of him who first put the piercing thought into apt words. So it is likely to have local color, a flavor of the soil in which it grew. Some of the aphorisms of Confucius may be universal, no doubt, but others and not a few of them, are essentially Chinese. I cannot help feeling that I discover a Roman quality in the saying of Marcus Aurelius, that "the best way to get revenge is to avoid being like the one who has injured you." This is not only Roman, it seems to have also an individual liberality disclosing a truly imperial mind.

Many of the maxims of the caustic La Rochefoucauld are marked with the time and place of their making,—the France of the aged Mazarin and of the youthful Louis XIV. When the French observer asserted that "you are never so easily cheated as when you are trying to

cheat somebody else," he is declaring a truth which might have been uttered by Aristophanes, by Molière or by Mark Twain, a truth upon which are established the schemes of the "green goods" man and the "gold brick" operator of New York in the twentieth century; but when he tells us that "virtue would not go far—if vanity did not keep it company,"—there we can detect the Frenchman of the seventeenth century. It is true that Sainte-Beuve credits La Rochefoucauld with large imagination,—not a frequent possession of the French,—finding evidence for this in another of these maxims,—"we cannot gaze fixedly at the sun, or at death." But most of these searching and scorching sentences are directly due to a disenchantment which envenoms La Rochefoucauld's scalpel; and this disenchantment was the result of a reaction of that social instinct which is a predominant French characteristic.

Of course, among the mass of French aphorisms there are a host which lack local color. When Madame de Boufflers suggested that "the only perfect people are those we do not know," she was making a remark that might have been uttered by an Italian—or even by a Spaniard. When the Spanish Gracian declared that "the ear is the area-gate of truth but the front-door of lies," he was saying something

that might have been said by an Englishman or by a Roman. And when Bacon asserted that "extreme self-lovers will set a house on fire and it were but to roast their eggs," the wording is British but the thought is one that might readily have occurred to a Frenchman and that might be easily paralleled in the pages of La Rochefoucauld.

There is little that is significantly oriental in this specimen of the wisdom of the East: "If you censure your friend for every fault he commits, there will come a time when you will have no friend to censure." A Frenchman could very well have said that, altho he might have phrased it more felicitously. On the other hand, many of the sayings of Nietzsche we could not well credit to an inquisitor of any other nationality or of any other century. "There are two things a true man likes,—danger and play; and he likes woman because she is the most dangerous of playthings." That is one of them, and there is another: "All women behind their personal vanity cherish an impersonal contempt for Woman." And yet even in Nietzsche we may find now and again a sentence which might have been set down on the tablets of that lonely stoic, Marcus Aurelius: "A slave cannot *be* a friend and a tyrant cannot *have* a friend."

II

The perennial commonplaces of observation are reincarnated in every generation, born again, century after century in every quarter of the globe, since man himself changes only a little, even tho mankind has ever the delusion of progress. It was an unknown but a most modern American who was once moved to the biting accusation against certain of his contemporary countrymen that they sought "first, to get on, then to get honor, and finally to get honest." Nevertheless this bitter jibe had been anticipated by the old Greek poet, Phokylides, who expressed his wish, "first to acquire a competence, and then to practise virtue." John Fiske once wrote an essay to indicate a few of the many points of resemblance between the Athenians of old and the Americans of today; and we need not despair of yet finding a Greek wit who had already dwelt on that disadvantage of "swapping horses while crossing a stream," which Lincoln once pointed out with his customary shrewdness.

It is perhaps because of their superior social instinct that the French are the modern masters of the maxim, and even if we who speak English are more abundant and more adroit in aphorism

than those who speak German or those who speak Italian, we must confess our constant inferiority to those who speak French, a language that lends itself to epigram because it has been suppled to the needs of a highly cultivated society of the nation most distinguished for its intelligence among the moderns as the Athenians were among the ancients. And of the two peoples who have English for their mother-tongue, we Americans, despite our superficial and superabundant loquacity, seem to be able to achieve the sententious at least as often as the British. Lincoln was a master of the compact and pregnant phrase; so was Emerson before him; and so was Franklin a century earlier.

In his autobiography Franklin tells how he utilized "the little spaces that occurred between the remarkable days" in the almanac (which he issued annually for twenty-five years and which was the basis of his own comfortable fortune) to contain "proverbial sentences, chiefly such as inculcated industry and frugality, as the means of procuring wealth, and thereby securing virtue;—it being more difficult for a man in want to act always honestly, as to use here one of these proverbs, 'it is hard for an empty sack to stand upright.'" Most of these proverbs were borrowed from "the wisdom of many ages

and nations," as Franklin himself acknowledges, but not a few of them seem to be due to his own witty wisdom; and that just quoted appears to be one of these. Taken as a whole, the sayings of Poor Richard range rather with the lowly proverb than with the more elevated and more incisive aphorism; and Lord Morley chose to dismiss them with curt contempt as "kitchen-maxims about thrift in time and money." Yet the saying about the empty sack rises a little above the level of the kitchen-maxim; and so does that other which declares that "if you would have your business done, go; if not send." One of Franklin's biographers records that when Paul Jones, after his victory in the "Ranger" went to Brest to await the new ship which had been promised him, he was tormented for months by excuses and delays despite his appeals to Franklin, to the royal family and to the king himself. Then at last he chanced to pick up 'Poor Richard,' and the saying just quoted hit home. He took the hint, "hurried to Versailles, and there got an order for the ship which he renamed in honor of his teacher, the 'Bonhomme Richard.'"

Emerson gives us "golden nuggets of thought," so Mr. Brownell suggests; but he does not mold them into beads and link them into necklaces. His essays lack unity, except that of theme and

of tone; and his sentences are, as he himself confessed, "infinitely repellent particles." No one of his essays is artistically composed and almost every one of his sentences is sufficient unto itself, with a careful adroitness of composition of which he alone in his time had the secret. He is master of the winged phrase, barbed to flesh itself in the memory. In his sentence there is not only meat, but meat dressed to perfection, cooked to a turn, and not lacking sauce. "No writer ever possessed a more distinguished verbal instinct, or indulged it with more delight,"—to quote again from Mr. Brownell; Emerson "fairly caresses his words and phrases and shows in his treatment of them a pleasure nearer sensuousness, perhaps, than any other he manifests."

None the less is it difficult to detach from his pages the exact maxim as we find it in Bacon and La Rochefoucauld and Vauvenargues. Emerson's thoughts are elevated and often subtle, but only rarely do they fall precisely into the form of the aphorism. He tells us that "the man in the street does not know a star in the sky";—but that is not quite a maxim, even if it escapes being a truism. He asserts that "it is as impossible for a man to be cheated by any one but himself, as for a thing to be and not to be at the same time";—but that can hardly be

called an aphorism, wise as it is and incisive. Perhaps the explanation lies in the fact that Emerson is wholly devoid of malice,—the malice that edges La Rochefoucauld's shafts to sting themselves into our consciousness. Emerson has few delusions about the ultimate infirmities of mankind, but he is never malevolent. He is clear-eyed, beyond all question, and yet he remains optimistic. In most maxim-makers there is a spice of ill-will, a taint of hostile contempt; and Emerson is ever free from ill-will, from contempt and from hostility.

III

In no department of the American branch of English literature is our benevolent optimism more pervadingly manifested than in our humor. American humor is likely to be good humor; even our satires are not cruelly savage, and our epigrams rarely have a poisoned dart at the tail of them. Our unquenchable friendliness has prevented most native fun-makers from focussing their gaze on the meaner possibilities of selfish egotism. It is not a little surprizing therefore that the largest and most liberally endowed of our later humorists, Mark Twain, should have taken to the making of maxims as disenchanted as those of Marcus Aurelius, altho not more

acrid than those of La Rochefoucauld. It was toward the end of his career, when he stood pleasantly conspicuous on the pinnacle of his fame, abundantly belauded and sincerely beloved, that his indurated sadness, his total dissatisfaction with life, found relief in chiseled sentences to be set beside the sayings of Epictetus.

Consider this: "Whoever has lived long enough to find out what life is, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first benefactor of our race;—he brought death into the world." Note how the same thought is brought forward again in this: "Why is it that we rejoice at a birth and grieve at a funeral? It is because we are not the person involved." And yet another twist is given to this same thought in a third saying: "All say, 'How hard it is that we have to die,'—a strange complaint to come from the mouths of people who have had to live."

Those who knew Mark Twain intimately were well aware of the despairing sadness that darkened his last years. He was wont to don the cap and bells to appear before the public; but in private, or at least when he was alone and lonely he sat in sackcloth and ashes. He had always had the melancholy which is likely to underlie and to sustain robust humor, and his

melancholy was even more intense and more astringent than that of Cervantes or Molière,—altho either of these might well have anticipated this saying of their belated brother in fun-making: "The man who is a pessimist before he is forty-eight knows too much; the man who is an optimist after he is forty-eight knows too little." But it may be doubted whether either the Spaniard or the Frenchman would have penned the assertion that "if you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you:—this is the principal difference between a dog and a man." Here we discover not mere pessimism but stark misanthropy. There is a sounder philosophy in another of his sayings: "Grief can take care of itself, but to get the full value of a joy you must have some one to share it with."

Quite possibly a majority of casual readers, finding these dark sayings scattered thru the bright pages of a professional funny-man, did not feel called upon to take them seriously and might even have accepted them as merely humorous over-statements intended to provoke laughter by their evident exaggeration. Those casual readers may have discovered no essential difference between the annihilating blankness of the opinions just quoted and utterances avowedly caustic,—such as the assertion that "one of the

most striking differences between a cat and a lie is that a cat has only nine lives." Yet even in this saying the playfulness serves only to hide from the hasty the solemn warning it disguises.

IV

It is the mark of the superior humorist that he arouses thought as well as laughter; and George Meredith held this to be the test of true comedy of the loftier type. Many a wise man has worn motley that he might win a smiling welcome for his message. When Josh Billings was amusing us with his acrobatic orthography, a critic in one of the literary reviews of London was sharp enough to see that the misfit spelling was only an eccentric costume put on to compel attention, like the towering plumes of the quack doctor's hat; and this critic, by stripping off this incongruous cloak, borrowed by Josh Billings from Artemus Ward, removed him from the company of the mere newspaper jest-manufacturers and promoted him to the upper class of more penetrating maxim-makers. Professor Bliss Perry recently remarked that the tone of many of the apothegms of Josh Billings is really grave and that often the moralizing might be by La Bruyère.

To the Josh Billings who frankly fellowships

with Artemus Ward we may credit this paragraph: "There iz two things in this life for which we are never fully prepared, and that iz twins," —a bold whimsical absurdity, which has served its purpose when it provokes the guffaw it aims to excite. But it is to the shrewd observer who is to be companied with La Bruyère that we must ascribe the statement,—here deprived of its undignified disguise of queer orthography,— that "when a fellow gets going down hill, it does seem as tho everything had been greased for the occasion." That is an echo from Greek philosophy; and here is another saying, in which Professor Perry finds the perfect tone of the great French moralists: "It is a very delicate job to forgive a man without lowering him in his own estimation, and in yours too." Perhaps it may be well to cite a third equally felicitous in its phrasing and equally acute in its content: "Life is short, but it is long enough to ruin any man who wants to be ruined." These are all assertions of universal veracity,—even tho they lack any specific American tang.

Local color is lacking also in the motto Washington Allston had painted on the wall of his studio: "Selfishness in art, as in other things, is sensibility kept at home." It is absent also from Thomas Bailey Aldrich's declaration that "a man is known by the company his mind

keeps." And it is wanting again in John Hay's distich:

There are three species of creatures who when they seem to be coming are going,
When they seem to be going they come; diplomats, women and crabs.

By the side of these may be set two of Mr. E. W. Howe's 'Country Town Sayings,'—"When a man tries himself, the verdict is usually in his favor"; and "Every one hates a martyr; it's no wonder martyrs were burned at the stake." Yet even in these remarks from the rural West, there is but little flavor of the soil. Perhaps this American savor can be detected a little more plainly in three of the sayings which Mr. Kin Hubbard credits to his creature, Abe Martin, and which he endows with the unpremeditated ease of the spoken word. One of them is to the effect that "nobuddy works as hard for his money as the feller that marries it." Another calls attention to the fact that "nobuddy ever listened t' reason on an empty stomach." And a third asserts that "folks that blurt out jist what they think wouldn't be so bad if they thought."

There is a homely directness about these rustic apothegms which makes them far more palatable than the strained and sophisticated

epigrams of the characters of Oscar Wilde's plays who are ever striving strenuously to dazzle us with verbal pyrotechnics. The labored contortions of the London jester seem to have a thin crackle when we compare them with these examples of rustic shrewdness sprouting spontaneously on the prairies. And in the aphorism, as in every other kind of literature, the fact is more important than the form, the content is more significant than the container.

(1915.)

VII

A PLEA FOR THE PLATITUDE

VII

A PLEA FOR THE PLATITUDE

I

IT is greatly to be regretted that we do not know the name of the man who boldly declared that "Grover Cleveland was the greatest master of platitude since George Washington." It would be amusing to inquire whether he meant this for a compliment to Cleveland or for a reproof to Washington. It would be interesting to ask him also whether he was prepared to concede that a practical politician at the head of the commonwealth ought to be a master of platitude. If the unknown utterer of this pregnant saying was willing to admit this, he would find himself in the comfortable company of that shrewd student of affairs, Walter Bagehot, who held that a statesman was likely to be most useful to the community when he combined common ideas and uncommon ability.

One of Cleveland's more recent successors in the presidency of the United States was accused of talking about the Ten Commandments just as if he had received them as a direct per-

sonal revelation to himself. Now, there is no denying that Theodore Roosevelt was wont to talk in this fashion. And why not? As a matter of fact, the Ten Commandments had come to him as a direct personal revelation—for so they must come to every one of us who is ready to receive them and to take them to heart. In the case of Roosevelt, as in the case of Washington and Cleveland, that which was foolishly meant as a reproof turns out to be really a compliment. There can be no more imperative duty for the chief of state in a democratic republic than to reiterate the eternal verities. It is his privilege also to profit by the megaphone which destiny has put at his lips to cry aloud these imperishable truths and thus to force them upon ears that might otherwise refuse to listen. It may be charged that when a leader of men is insistent in asserting again and again that honesty is the best policy, he is lowering himself to the inculcation of the obvious. But if this is just what he believes to be needful at the moment, he has no right to shrink from saying once again what many have asserted before him. Stevenson hit the center when he suggested that "after all, the commonplaces are the great poetic truths."

Perhaps there is small risk in declaring that we Americans have a lust for novel ideas and

that we listen with jaded credulity to those who get up in the market-place to proclaim a new gospel. Yet we are all aware that what is new is not likely to be true and that what is true is likely to be old. We all know this, and yet we are often impatient with those old fogies who abide by the ancient land-marks. We are prone to laugh at the mossbacks brave enough to risk the reproach brought against the katydid,—which has the habit of saying "an undisputed thing in such a solemn way." The undisputed things are always in danger of being neglected; and they need to be said afresh to every generation, in the special vocabulary of that generation and with whatever of solemnity we can command. The wisdom of the fathers must be restated for the benefit of the children, and yet again for the guidance of the grandchildren.

Just as it is a certain evidence of juvenility to shriek out an accusation of plagiarism whenever two plays happen to have a casual resemblance of situation or whenever two poems chance to have a superficial identity of phrase or of cadence, so it is an assured sign of immaturity to sneer at the political leader who reasserts the principles which he deems permanent and essential for the common weal and to scoff at him as a dealer in platitudes and as

an expounder of commonplaces. "Commonplace," said Lord Morley (in words that sound almost like an echo of Stevenson's), "after all, is exactly what contains the truths which are indispensable."

The brief speech which Lincoln delivered at Gettysburg nearly sixty years ago is now accepted as one of the masterpieces of English prose, withstanding comparison with the address on a similar occasion that Thucydides put into the mouth of Pericles. It is as perfect in its lofty dignity of sentiment as it is in its lapidary concision of style. But there would be little difficulty in proving that it contains nothing new, since the thoughts that sustain it are as self-evident as they are sincere. They are the ancient thoughts which demanded to be voiced again, then and there. The stones of this sublime structure are commonplaces, recognized as such long before Lincoln was born, long before Columbus set sail on the Western Ocean. These well-worn blocks Lincoln chose for his own use with his unerring tact; and he cemented them together once again by his own personality.

Hamlet's soliloquy, "To be or not to be," is a mosaic of sentiments and of opinions familiar to every one of us from our youth up and already phrased in all sorts of fashions in every tongue,

living or dead; — nevertheless that monolog, compounded as it may be of commonplaces, bereft of all novelty, glows and burns with the inner fire of Hamlet's soul at that awful crisis of his fate. It propounds, once for all, the mighty questions we cannot help putting to ourselves when we also find ourselves in the valley of the shadow. And when the time comes for any one of us to face those questions we shall not cavil at their antiquity, for then they will erect themselves in front of us with a new-born challenge.

II

It may be acknowledged frankly that the Gettysburg speech and Hamlet's soliloquy are extreme cases. The savor of a stimulating individuality is likely to be lacking from compositions as fundamentally unoriginal as these two are seen to be when they are reduced to their elements. A commonplace is effective and therefore not merely to be pardoned but even to be praised, only when it is a personal rediscovery of the speaker, when he unhesitatingly believes himself to be speaking out of the fulness of his own feeling. At the moment he may not know, and he surely does not care, whether or not the things he is called upon to

speak have ever been uttered before; and he is well aware that this does not matter at all, since these things have come to him fresh from his own experience, hot from his own heart. Then the platitude is redeemed and transfigured by poignant personality,—as when the fabled Scotchman asseverated earnestly that "Honesty *is* the best policy," adding by way of explanation, "I hae tried baith." What can be more commonplace than "honesty is the best policy"? It is the tritest of truisms, but it came to the mouth of that man from the depth of his own soul. He had no doubt but that he was lighting a torch for the feet of those who wander in darkness.

Deprive commonplace of this note of rediscovery, by which the old is made new of its own accord, and it is the abomination of desolation. A sequence of platitudes peddled from a platform by an uninspired speaker who refuses to rely on his actual feelings, who never had an idea of his own and who is seeking to say only what nobody will dispute,—this cannot fail to be stale, flat and unprofitable, even if every single commonplace of which it is compacted may contain an immitigable truth. It is the prevalence of speechmaking of this sort, so threadbare and so colorless that it seems insincere, which revolts those who demand that

a man shall reveal some evidence either of emotion or of cerebration before they will listen to him. This attitude is natural enough, but it brings with it a double danger. First of all, it tempts us to disregard the truth which may be clothed in the most offensively insipid commonplace; and second, it allures us into the primrose path of paradox.

The commonplace is not always to be accepted at its face value. It may not be true now, whatever it has been once upon a time; and it may even never have been true, but only plausible and specious. There is no virtue in the commonplace itself, and there may be vice in it. Its value resides wholly in the truth which it may contain and which each of us must appraise for himself. But as the truth is not necessarily inherent in a platitude, neither is it necessarily inherent in a paradox. Even Mr. Shaw and Mr. Chesterton, if pushed to the wall, would probably be willing to admit that there are some paradoxes which are not true. They might be ready even to accept the definition of a paradox as a truth serving its apprenticeship.

That is what a paradox may be, no doubt; it may be a peremptory challenge to a commonplace which has ceased to sheathe the verity, even if it has not yet worn out its welcome.

The paradox of this quality, however, is not really a paradox; it is only a pseudo-paradox; it is a new shape of truth; and by that very fact it is condemned to become a commonplace in its turn, whenever it shall have ousted the platitude it is attacking. This pseudo-paradox, which sooner or later will inevitably issue from unthinking lips as an impregnable platitude, is never merely a commonplace reversed. To turn a truth upside down is not to turn it inside out. To stand a truism on its head is profitless; and there is no stimulus to clear thought in the glib suggestion that "Dishonesty is the best policy" or that "procrastination is the guardian of time." An infelicity of phrasemaking like this may have an evanescent glitter, yet it is but the flickering of thorns under a pot. It may amuse babes and sucklings for a little season to be told that the devil is not as black as he is painted, since he possesses at least the Christian virtue of perseverance. Verbal fireworks are attractive only to the very young. The writer whose pages corruscate with unexpected inversions of accepted beliefs and who exhibits himself as a catherine-wheel of multicolored paradox is likely soon to sputter out in darkness and in silence. If Mr. Bernard Shaw has any abiding value as a stimulating thinker this is in spite of his flamboyant method of expressing himself and not because of it.

A French critic has asserted that men may be grouped in three classes, so far as their attitude toward the truth is concerned. First of all, there is the immense majority assured that the wisdom of the past will be the wisdom of the future and glad always to hear again the accepted commonplaces. Second, there is a youthful minority, weary of these traditional statements and avidly relishing any paradox which seems to pierce the crust of convention. Third, there is the little knot of those who are in the habit of doing their own thinking and who are ever ready to receive a novel idea on probation, to weigh it cautiously and to test it thoroly with willingness to accept it ultimately and to make it their own thereafter if it approves itself. It is from this small company that new ideas come into being, and get into circulation. The members of this third group have to be won over before any novelty has a valid chance of acceptance; and when at last they have been taken captive, the members of the first group will slowly, very slowly, and after violent opposition, follow in their wake. The chosen few carry the flag to the front; and trailing after them comes the immense majority which gives solidity to the body politic, changing its mind only by almost imperceptible degrees. And the second group, the youthful minority, with its delight in disintegrating paradox, is almost

negligible, because it lacks intellectual sincerity. Its puerile protests against the platitudes which buttress the social organization merely irritate the immense majority, while they evoke only tolerant contempt from wiser men. The youthful minority is puffed up with pride at its discovery that elementary truths are commonplace. But bread and beef are the commonplaces of diet, none the less wholesome, and indeed none the less welcome, because they lack the spice of novelty. Man cannot live by paradox alone. If the staff of life chances to be contained in any paradox, then this is not a true paradox and then also it is on the way in its turn to become a platitude. It was Boileau who remarked that "a new thought is a thought which must have come to many but which some one happens first to express," and this is perhaps the source of Pope's "What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed." If we insist on escaping from the fenced field of the commonplace, we cannot complain if we find ourselves landing in the thorny hedge of freakish unreason.

. . . . . .

(1914.)

VIII

ON THE LENGTH OF CLEOPATRA'S NOSE

VIII

ON THE LENGTH OF CLEOPATRA'S NOSE

I

ONE of the best known and most frequently quoted of the 'Thoughts' of Pascal calls attention to the way in which a little thing may have great consequences. "He who wants a full understanding of the vanity of man has only to consider the causes and the effects of love. The cause is 'I know not what'; and the consequences of it are frightful. This 'I know not what' so trivial that it can scarcely be recognized, moves all mankind,—kings and armies and the entire social organization. The nose of Cleopatra,—if it had been shorter, the history of the world would have been changed."

Altho Cleopatra was the Serpent of the Old Nile she was not an Egyptian but a Greek; she was a hyphenated queen,—which is what queens usually are. Even if Mahaffy was right in holding that the Greeks were not really so superior to us in physical beauty as the surviving statues might lead us to believe, she may have had more than her share of the good looks which

must have been not uncommon among the Hellenic peoples. As she was a Greek she probably did not have a Roman nose; indeed her nose may have been "tip-tilted like the petal of a flower," which would not have diminished her fascination. But whatever the shape or the length of her nose, Pascal is justified in believing that if it had been unduly short she would probably not have descended the corridors of time as the heroine of the most disastrous of historic love-stories. She might then have floated down the river in her glittering barge without finding Mark Antony at her feet when she stepped ashore.

If Mark Antony had escaped the coils of the Egyptian serpent, he might not have lost the battle of Actium; and if he had vanquished the young Octavius, Mark Antony might have been the founder of the Roman Empire. But Mark Antony was unfitted for the appalling task of solidifying a realm on the verge of wreck. He was too impetuous and too fickle, too emotional and too uncertain. He lacked the self-restraint, the caution and the astute statecraft of the Augustus who laid solid the foundations of Rome's imperial grandeur. Even if Mark Antony had made himself master of the Mediterranean lands, and if he had ruled as long as he lived, it is unlikely that he would have governed

wisely; and after his death, chaos would have come again. The empire would not have been skilfully buttressed and its outlying territories would not have been unified with Rome and grateful for the three centuries of assured prosperity which followed the advent of Augustus. When the time was fulfilled, the gates of the empire would not have been guarded and the barbarians would have broken in. There would have followed swift disintegration and destruction; and there would have been no lingering Decline and no long deferred Fall for Gibbon to chronicle and to illuminate. Then we moderns would not have come into the heritage upon which our civilization is based.

It is very lucky for us today that the nose of Cleopatra was of a normal length and that the frightful consequences of its possible abbreviation were avoided. If it had been shorter, it would have changed not only her face but the face of the world in this twentieth century. Yet I may venture to hint a doubt whether Cleopatra's nose or Cleopatra herself, had really the immense importance that Pascal asserted. It is true that the captivating queen of Egypt was Antony's evil genius and that she was responsible for his ignominious defeat. But if we look a little longer and a little deeper, we are likely to conclude that Antony's fatal weakness was in

himself, in his unstable character, in his lawless and lustful temperament. If he had never laid eyes on Cleopatra, the ultimate result might well have been the same. She was not the only charmer of her time, even if she might be the most dangerous. There were others; and any one of them could have lured the unstable Roman to his allotted doom.

More than one later writer has applied Pascal's thought to other historical events. Among them was Eugène Scribe, most adroit of playwrights even if he was devoid of the ample vision of the more richly endowed dramatists. One of his most ambitious and most ingenious comedies is 'A Glass of Water; or Great Effects from Little Causes.' It dealt not with Queen Cleopatra of Egypt but with Queen Anne of England; and it aroused the ire of Thackeray, who was in Paris when it was originally presented in 1840. Thackeray was then only a hard-working journalist contributing to a heterogeny of magazines. He took this play of Scribe's as the text for a paper on 'English History and Character on the French Stage.' He expressed his disapproval of Scribe's assumption that "the historical trophies of England are generally the result of some mean accident, which entirely strips them of their ideal glory."

After analyzing the French piece, the English

critic asserted that Scribe was "wrong in his general principle," since "trivial circumstances are in this life pretexts, not causes, for breach of long established connections." They are "the readily available facts which discover the depth of an existing difference; they are seized to decide an already impending rupture." In other words, the little thing which sometimes seems so significant is only what the physicians call an exciting cause, always far less important than what they term a predisposing condition. The last straw does not break the camel's back unless that patient beast is already laden to the limit of endurance. The slight pressure on the hair-trigger which fires the gun, did not load the weapon or aim it.

II

But even if little things are unlikely to have great consequences, there are often remote causes not immediately apparent to those who contemplate their ultimate results. I remember a whimsical suggestion in a book by one of Darwin's disciples—altho I cannot now recapture the title of the volume or the name of its author—to the effect that the sturdy stanchness of the British army, the stubborn resistance of the "thin, red line" was due to the prevalence

of spinsterhood in Great Britain, to the fact that the women outnumber the men. The explanation of this paradox is to be found in a sequence of causes and consequences. The British soldier is nourished on beef and the quality of the beef is due to an abundance of clover, which needs to be fertilized by bees. But bees cannot multiply and live unless they are protected against the field-mice which destroy their broods and ravage their reserves of honey. The field-mouse can be kept down if there are only cats enough to catch them; and cats are the favorites of the frequent old maids of England. These lonely virgins keep pets who prevent the mice from despoiling and destroying the bees, so clover flourishes luxuriantly and the cattle wax fat to supply the soldiers of the king with their strengthening rations.

For another illustration of a remote cause having a most unexpected consequence, I am able to give chapter and verse. In Sir Martin Conway's brilliant discussion of the 'Domain of Art,' he tells us that the beautiful costumes of the Cavaliers of England, as we see them in Vandyke's portraits, owe their chief embellishment to the hardy mariners who ventured into the stormy waters near Spitzbergen:

An interesting example of the reaction of invention or discovery upon one of the arts of life came recently

under my observation, and is perhaps worth a brief digression to record. In the process of conducting, in the Public Record Office, researches into the history of Spitzbergen and of the English and Dutch whaling industries on its coasts, I was struck by the numerous documents relating to soap that I kept encountering. On looking more closely into the matter, it presently appeared that the chief use to which whale-oil was put was the manufacture of the better class of soap, such as was used in fine laundry work, commoner old-fashioned soap being made out of rape-seed. When it is borne in mind that, before the beginning of the English whale-fishery on the Spitzbergen coasts about 1610 there was practically no whale-oil brought into England, the relative dearth of good soap in Tudor days may be deduced. Improved laundry work followed the whale-fishery. Hence the relatively small ruffs that we see in Tudor portraits and the small amount of linen displayed. Jacobean portraits show more linen and lace. Portraits of the time of Charles I yet more.

As I transcribe this passage, due to Sir Martin's researches into the history of art and to his own exploration of Spitzbergen, I am reminded of a chat that we had one rainy afternoon a score of years ago in the spacious smoking-room built on the roof of the Athenæum in London. In the course of our wandering conversation we happened to touch on this topic,—the unknown origin of things well known.

"Are you aware," he asked with a smile, "that the outflowering of Tudor architecture, which is one of the glories of England, must be

ascribed to the cultivation of the turnip by the Dutch?"

I smiled in my turn and admitted my ignorance of this fact. "But I can tell you," I added, "how it is that Nelson's victory at Trafalgar brought about the popularity of British jams and marmalades in the United States. Are you aware of that?"

"No," he answered. "Let us expound our riddles to each other."

I besought him to begin the exposition.

"Well," he said, "England has a damp climate, as you may have noticed; and that makes it the best grazing country in the world—especially for sheep. But until the culture of root-crops was developed in Holland and transplanted to England, our farmers found it almost impossible to carry their sheep through the winter. This was made easy for them by the introduction of the turnip. Whereupon there was an immediate increase in sheep-raising, which ultimately gave England the immensely profitable wool-trade. And the enriched Tudor merchants, like true Englishmen, spent their gains freely on their houses. Now for Trafalgar and marmalade."

"Well," I said, " Nelson's defeat of the French and Spanish fleets gave England thereafter the undisputed command of the sea and cut the

Continent off from the colonies. The chief of the earlier importations from tropical countries had been sugar; and the deprivation of this was so keenly felt that Napoleon offered a tempting reward for a method of making sugar independent of sugar-cane. This was the origin of the beet-sugar industry, which had at first to be fostered by bounties from the government. After Waterloo, half the countries of the Continent found themselves with thousands of acres of beet-fields which would go out of cultivation if cane-sugar should be allowed to compete. To protect the farmers, some countries, including Germany, put a high tariff on cane-sugar and paid an export-bounty on beet-sugar. As England was soon to be a free-trade country, this German bounty-fed beet-sugar was in time dumped on the London market. It ruined the sugar-planters of Jamaica and Barbadoes; but it gave the British makers of preserves their chief raw material at a price which enabled them to import oranges from Spain to Dundee and even strawberries from France to London, and then to export wholesale to the United States their marmalades and jams."

"I see," said Conway, "and now I'd like to ask you whether you have ever traced the defeat of the Armada to Martin Luther? No? Then I will enlighten you as to that. When

Henry VIII broke with the Pope, he followed Luther's example and did away with the frequent fast-days. This was a sad blow to the fisher folk; but they regained a temporary prosperity under Mary, only to lose it again under Elizabeth. So it was that the experienced crews of the fishing fleet were glad to volunteer to repel the naval attack of the Spanish sovereign; and they supplied an indisputable element to the flying squadrons of the British admirals."

Then it was my turn to put another question. "I'd like to ask whether you have ever considered the influence of the Gulf Stream on the field-sports of England, cricket and lawn-tennis and football? If these sports are indulged in by a multitude of young men and maidens, part of the credit must go to the ample current of warm water which flows incessantly across the Atlantic in an invisible channel of its own. As the British Isles are as far north as is Labrador on our side of the Western Ocean, they would be as desolate and as sparsely peopled as Labrador were it not for the softening effect of the Gulf Stream. Because it is nearer the Arctic, England has a longer day than France or the United States; and therefore the young men and maidens can do a day's work and still have two or three hours of daylight in which to play out-

door games. So you British had best beware, for if we Americans are ever aroused to wrath and if we succeed in diverting the Gulf Stream, then Great Britain will speedily descend to the sad condition of a sparsely inhabited island."

III

THE Gentle Reader is now in possession of the principles and the processes of a novel sport; and he can hunt down strange, unsuspected and remote causes whenever he is sleepless at night or bookless on a train. The game can be played by any one, "all by his lone," as a solitaire; or a half-dozen may take part, sitting in a cozy semi-circle about the wood-fire while the winter wind swirls the dry snow against the frosted windows. You may seek out the ulterior propulsion responsible for the arrival of an event which may be local or national or even international, since no man's eye can follow the ever-widening circle that any word or deed may set in motion.

Here are three sample inquiries likely to be puzzling to novices at the sport. The first is very easy: Explain how it is that the dykes of Holland were responsible for the prevalence of high-stoop residences in Chicago. The second is not quite so simple: Show how it is that the

invention of the cotton-gin by Eli Whitney was a dominating factor in the adoption by the United States of a constitutional amendment prohibiting the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors. And the third takes a wider range and demands a ramble over three continents: How was it that Cleveland's election was one of the reasons why the foreign legations in Peking had to withstand the attacks of the so-called Black Flags during the Boxer Rebellion?

By the aid of the dykes the Dutch reclaimed a large part of their land from the sea, a reclamation which required a system of canals to catch the surface water. In a flat country, having an intricate network of canals, it is impossible to excavate dry cellars under the dwellings. So the Dutch raised the first floor of their houses that they might construct cellars above the water-level; and this forced them to put a flight of outside steps before the front-door. When the sons of Holland settled on Manhattan Island and founded New Amsterdam, they cut a canal into what is now Broad Street; and in their house-building they followed the fashions of their native land. From New York the high stoop was borrowed by many cities in the West, altho these towns had dry land for their cellars and altho the high stoop is not an architectural device of inherent attractiveness.

At the end of the eighteenth century slavery was slowly disappearing in the United States. It had been abandoned in most of the northern states; and in the South Washington and Jefferson expected its early extinction. But Whitney invented the cotton-gin and there followed an immediate increase in the acreage in which cotton was under cultivation. The southern planters decided that they could not do without slave-labor; and the negro was emancipated only as an incident of the Civil War. After the Reconstruction period the black race multiplied; and on the weaker members of the race liquor exerted a dangerous influence. To remove the temptation with its baleful possibilities, the white men of the South, many of whom were not themselves abstemious, voted for Prohibition. Without the support of the solid South the constitutional amendment would have failed of ratification.

In Cleveland's second term he sent to Congress his Venezuela message, which was a notification to all the world that the United States would not allow any European nation to enlarge the boundaries of its possessions in South America, —a notification fatal to the intention of the German Emperor to acquire more or less of Brazil. Forced to look elsewhere, the Kaiser took advantage of the killing of several German missionaries to seize Kiau-Chau, a seizure which

infuriated the Chinese and which moved them to the Boxer rebellion culminating in an attack on the foreigners in Peking.

IV

Perhaps this parlor game of unforeseen consequences may appear to the Gentle Reader not a little childish; and I may as well confess at once that it has been anticipated by one of the most primitive of nursery-tales, what which explains to us the manifold reasons why the Old Woman could not get home—because the Cat wouldn't eat the Rat, because the Rat wouldn't gnaw the Rope, because the Rope wouldn't hang the Butcher, because the Butcher wouldn't kill the Calf, because the Calf wouldn't drink the Water, because the Water wouldn't quench the Fire, because the Fire wouldn't burn the Stick, because the Stick wouldn't beat the Dog, because the Dog wouldn't bite the Pig, and because the Pig wouldn't go over the stile.

But it is not so puerile a sport as it may seem if we keep in mind always the necessary distinction between the exciting cause, which may be only a triviality and the predisposing condition, which is always the dominant factor. What Austin Dobson called

> The little great, the infinite small thing,
> That ruled the hour when Louis Quinze was king

may be no more than the last ounce that weights down the scales of destiny on one side or the other. There is truth also in the same poet's assertion that the fan in the delicate fingers of Madame de Pompadour may have given the signal which resulted in the ruin of a realm.

> Ah, but things more than polite
> Hung on this toy, *voyez vous!*
> Matters of state and of might,
> Things that great ministers do;
> Things that, may be, overthrew
> Those in whose brains they began;
> Here was the sign and the cue,—
> This was the Pompadour's fan!

Yet it was not the flutter of a French fan which brought about the War of the Austrian Succession; it was the selfishness of a German king, as devoid of scruple as he was free from hypocrisy. Macaulay tells us that Frederick's own words were that "ambition, interest, the desire of making people talk about me carried the day; and I decided for war." And Macaulay passed the verdict of history, not to be reopened even by the eloquent special pleading of Carlyle: "On the head of Frederick is all the blood which was shed in a war that raged during many years and in every quarter of the globe, the blood of the column of Fontenoy, the blood of the mountaineers who were slaughtered at Colloden. . . .

In order that he might rob a neighbor whom he had promised to defend, black men fought on the coast of Coromandel, and red men scalped each other by the Great Lakes of North America."

(1921.)

IX

CONCERNING CONVERSATION

IX

CONCERNING CONVERSATION

I

IT is not always that foreigners, adrift for a few weeks in these United States, exhibit that condescension which Lowell resented sharply. Sometimes they reveal themselves as very frank in expressing their disappointment and their disapproval. It cannot be denied that they are often disappointed in us—perhaps almost as often as we are disappointed in them. They may have ventured across the Western Ocean merely to spy out the land, or they may have arrived as missionaries of culture, having prepared themselves to enlighten us by means of "lectures in words of one syllable,"—to borrow a pertinent phrase of Colonel Higginson's. But whether they come as single spies or in lecturing battalions they rarely display the self-control which prevented Thackeray from adverse criticism of his quondam hosts. Dickens had been welcomed as the guest of the nation; but he did not hold that the acceptance of our hospitality debarred him from the privilege of speaking his mind freely about his entertainers.

Many lesser men have shared our bread and salt; and not a few of them have felt free to follow the example of Dickens rather than that of Thackeray.

In the fall of 1909 a wandering British philosopher, who hailed from the University of Cambridge, was a guest at various American colleges; and after he had gone back to his own place he published in a Cambridge review his opinion that "in America there is, broadly speaking, no culture. There is instruction; there is research; there is technical and professional training; there is specialisation in science and in industry; there is every possible application of life to purposes and ends; but there is no life for its own sake." And he declared that "you will find if you travel long in America, that you are suffering from a kind of atrophy. You will not, at first, realise what it means. But suddenly it will flash upon you that you are suffering from lack of conversation. You do not converse; you cannot; you can only talk. It is the rarest thing to meet a man who, when a subject is started, is willing or able to follow it out into its ramifications, to play with it, to embroider it with pathos or with wit, to penetrate to its roots, to trace its connexions and affinities. Question and answer, anecdote and jest are the staple of American conversation;

and, above all, information. They have a hunger for positive facts."

In a sweeping assertion like this there is certainly no hint of condescension, even if there is in it a disquieting assumption of superiority. That it should have been made by an Englishman is a little startling, since our kin across the sea would seem to be related to us in nothing more intimately than in their desire for information and their hunger for positive facts. It would have been more understandable if this assertion had been risked by a Frenchman, since the French are governed by the social instinct and trained from their youth up to be easy in converse themselves and also to put others at their ease. There it is, however, made by an Englishman; and this leaves us wondering what Hawthorne could have meant when he made one of the entries in the notebook he kept while he was in exile as consul to Liverpool. "I wish I could know exactly what the English style good conversation. Probably it is something like plum-pudding,—as heavy, but seldom as rich."

II

YET there is profit always in weighing the words of an alien critic of American characteristics and in trying to discover how much of

truth may be contained in his off-hand opinion. We can afford to overlook the casual discourtesy of his supercilious and superficial phrase if we are able to get at the core of his accusation. It is well that we should know ourselves; and we cannot deny our gratitude to the foreigner who forces us to take stock of our deficiencies. If we are frank we must admit that question and answer, anecdote and jest, are frequent in our mouths and that our ears hunger for information. The relish for anecdote and jest is one manifestation of that omnipresent American humor, which is also good humor and which may often degenerate into mere triviality. The desire for positive facts is an attribute of our practicality, of our ability to turn everything to account. We are not unlike the Athenians of old in our eagerness to hear and to tell some new thing; and probably some part of the widespread ability to shift our ingenuity suddenly into new channels may be ascribed to this very characteristic. A chance fact dropped in talk by a stranger, a casual scrap of information picked up by the wayside—these things may have been the seed-corn of many a new industry. We have no cause to blush when we are told that we have a hunger for positive facts or even when we are assured that the staple of our talk is question and answer.

This is as it should be; and no man has a right to expect anything more in ordinary talk. But the imported lecturer made a sharp distinction between ordinary talk and genuine conversation. Talk is all in the day's work; it is practical; it consists of question and answer; it lends itself lightly to the interchange of facts and to the swapping of stories. Conversation is another thing altogether, or rather it is the same thing elevated and glorified. There is the same difference between talk and conversation that there is between house-painting and the mural decoration of Puvis de Chavannes or of John La Farge. Talk might be called one of the mechanical arts, whereas conversation is one of the fine arts. Only a man born to the craft, specifically gifted for it, trained by years of practise, enlightened by the example of the masters of conversation, can take a subject, "follow it out in all its ramifications, play with it, embroider it with pathos or with wit, penetrate to its roots, and trace its connexions and affinities." A great converser is like any other great artist, born not made,—or rather born and also made.

Our Cambridge critic has here supplied an admirable definition of the fine art of conversation as distinguished from the frankly inartistic talk of every day life. Where he made his slip was in expecting to find practitioners of this

delicate art scattered all over the United States wherever his engagements might take him. In no country of the world is any one of the fine arts cultivated by the average man; and it is absurd to expect the average man to lift himself to this exalted level of artistic accomplishment. The average man has no time for any of the fine arts; he is too busy trying to keep a roof over his head and to make a living for his family. The masters of conversation are no more frequent in America than they are anywhere else; and the visitor from abroad is no more likely to drop into the center of a circle of these artists here than an American abroad is likely to happen into a similar group on the other side. In no country do these artists in conversation hold an open exhibition and sell tickets at the door.

Hawthorne, for example, before he went to England, had attended the Saturday luncheons at Boston, with Lowell at one end of the table and Holmes at the other; and it is small wonder that he failed to find conversation of that kind in Liverpool. The itinerant lecturer who recorded his sufferings from a lack of conversation here in the United States did not have the good fortune to penetrate into the circles where that fine art is cultivated. At home he knew where to go to get just what he wanted; and because he did not know where to get it here,

he was rash enough to deny that it existed. The blunder may have been natural enough; but it was a blunder nevertheless. And it was intensified by his failure to reflect on the fact that he was not one of us, but an outsider, a man not tested, an unknown quantity, passing through hastily and only pausing here and there to eat and to sleep and to speak his piece and then away. Even if he had by chance found himself in a circle of true lovers of conversation, he himself would have been a disturbing element and he might have departed without ever suspecting that he had been in the company of the very artists whose society he was vainly seeking. A master of conversation might shrink from showing off before a stranger; he might prefer to reserve for his intimates the full display of his powers.

III

Our British visitor failed to find fit conversation here in America, yet he seems to have had no doubt that it existed in England. But a recent American writer is saddened because it cannot now be found anywhere. He has asserted that "present day conversation has sunk far below the high levels of the talk of the past"; that "our conversational performances are flat, thin and poor"; and "that conversation is indeed

a lost art." He believed that this assertion would pass unchallenged and he set it in the foreground of a welcome volume into which he collected half-a-score of essays on the subject. He even ventured to entitle this agreeable gathering the 'Lost Art of Conversation.' Here again we find cropping up the ineradicable belief that this is a day of decadence and that there were giants in other days to whose stature we cannot hope to stretch ourselves. We are all prone to be praisers of passed times,—especially when we are very young or very old. The great masters are all dead and we have been born too late into an exhausted world. There are no great actors now and no great orators and no great conversationalists. Yet this belief is the result of an optical illusion like that which leads us to think the telegraph poles are closer together the farther off they are.

As a matter of fact good conversation is probably no rarer today and in these United States than it ever was anywhere. It must always be rare, if conversation is truly one of the fine arts. It flourished in London in the eighteenth century in the club, which gathered about Johnson, altho his selfish brutality must often have killed the easy interchange of question and answer, since Johnson was incorrigibly domineering; and as Goldsmith said "whenever his pistol missed fire, he knocked you down with

the butt." Conversation flourishes today in New York in several little circles where there are men of the world and men of affairs who are able to follow a subject out into its ramifications and to play with it, penetrating to its roots and embroidering it with wit and with pathos. Such little circles are not many, of course, but they exist here and now, known to those who are competent to join them— and necessarily unknown to the rest of the world.

In the illuminating collection of essays on the 'Lost Art of Conversation' I find the two characteristically acute papers of Robert Louis Stevenson on 'Talk and Talkers.' Stevenson was a delightful talker himself, as I can testify, altho I had only the privilege of one afternoon session with him, not long before he left England for the last time. In these essays he painted the portraits of six of his friends whom he held to be masters of the art of conversation. These friends whose powers he was celebrating he disguised under various names,—"Burly," "Spring heel'd Jack," "Cockshot" and "Purcell." Most of them are now dead and there is no indiscretion in giving their real names. "Cockshot" was Professor Fleeming Jenkin, whose biography Stevenson was to write. "Burly" was his collaborator, W. E. Henley, who turned traitor after Stevenson's death. "Spring heel'd Jack" was his cousin, R. A. M. Stevenson. "Athel-

red" was, I believe, his executor, Mr. Baxter; "Opalstein" was John Addington Symonds, and "Purcell" was Mr. Edmund Gosse.

It was my good fortune in the early eighties of the last century to make the acquaintance of four out of the six; I never had the pleasure of talking with Symonds or with Mr. Baxter—and I think I had speech with R. A. M. Stevenson only two or three times. But the other three I met frequently, often together, altho they were not as intimate with each other severally as they were with Stevenson himself. That they were masters of the art of conversation, conscious and deliberate artists,—this is beyond all question. Fleeming Jenkin, more especially, was one of the most gifted and spontaneous talkers I have ever had the delight of listening to,—full of whim and of wisdom, delighting in expounding theories tinctured with his own sparkling originality.

Yet I should hesitate to assign to any one of these four British subjects a higher place in the hierarchy of good talkers than I should bestow upon four American citizens,—Thomas B. Reed and John Hay, Clarence King and Thomas Bailey Aldrich. They were all wits, but they none of them insisted on reducing talk to a soliloquy, as Macaulay and Gladstone were wont to do. A brilliant conversationalist can-

not be a monolog artist. He must give and take; he must play the game fairly, allowing his associates a chance to show what they can do also. On the other hand, wit is the most precious ingredient of good talk; and no lover of high converse will hold with Prior's man who

> Thinks wit the bane of conversation,
> And says that learning spoils a nation.

Tom Reed's conversation was a constant delight, due in part to his caustic wit. John Hay had the same wide knowledge of men and affairs; and his talk was also flavored with a subacid wit. Clarence King had an equally large acquaintance with the world and an equally frank delivery of his opinion about men and things. And as for Aldrich, pearls of wit dropped from his lips whenever he opened his mouth. I chanced to say to him once that it was curious how a certain British scholar, who seemed to have read everything and written about everything, should not have gained greater wisdom by all his labors. "Yes," said Aldrich, "he is like a gaspipe,—no richer for the illumination it has conveyed."

IV

Of course, this specimen brick is wholly inadequate even to suggest an idea of the house of conversation in which Reed and Hay, Aldrich

and King, made themselves at home. Good talk is not merely a swift succession of good things; and after a while a sequence of smart sayings will prove fatiguing. The subject must be embroidered with pathos as well as with wit, and it must be penetrated to its roots and explored in its affinities, as the British lecturer asserted. Good talk calls for the clash of opinions and for the shock of prejudices. Contradiction—the courteous contradiction of an equal who has self-respect so abundant that he respects also the views of his opponent,—contradiction is of the essence of the contract. There never was a more foolish definition than that which declared an agreeable man to be "a man who agrees with you." So far as conversation is concerned an agreeable man is one who disagrees with you, courteously but insistently,—who assaults your private opinions and who takes your pet prejudices by storm. For really good talk you need the man who can see both sides of a question and who can suddenly discover a third side, disconcerting to both parties. He may be a feeble arithmetician who tries to make two half-truths equal a whole truth; and yet even this may be risked in conversation, sprung upon the hearers unexpectedly, to force them to go back to first principles.

It seemed fairest to match Stevenson's quartet

of British conversers with four Americans now departed and therefore to be named here without impropriety. In my own generation I should be at no loss to single out at least half-a-dozen masters of the art of conversation, not unworthy of comparison with those whom I have already called to the witness stand. Two or three of my colleagues at Columbia University could not be omitted from any catalog of competent conversers; they are scholars who have not allowed their wide knowledge to weigh down their wit and who are free from the reproach that Vauvenargues brought against "the men of learning who resemble gross feeders with a bad digestion." Equally insistent upon admission to the list of the good talkers I happen to know are two artists, one a mural painter and the other an illustrator, whose conversation has the ring of the true metal. Both of them have what Stevenson credited to Henley, "a desire to hear,—altho not always to listen." Altho both of them may succumb on occasion to the temptation to monolog, they can be tempted into team-play, serving an idea like a tennis-ball, with long rallies, during which the subject flies high and is returned sharply and seems about to fall to the ground only to be caught up dexterously and driven into an unexpected corner.

The reason why conversation of the highest

type is infrequent is that its substance must be ideas rather than things or persons. Now, the immense majority of mankind seem to be interested if not solely, at least chiefly, in persons. Nothing human is foreign to them and they take a keen relish in discussing their fellow creatures. Yet the bulk of this talk is about individuals, known to the talkers themselves; and the conversation of the majority rarely aspires to deal with humanity at large, with men and women in their ampler relations. For the most part this talk is mere gossip, the interchange of question and answer about friends and acquaintances. A comfortable minority may like to converse about things, and to exchange information. It is this minority which exhibits that hunger for facts, which our British visitor noted. Comparatively few are those who can lift themselves up to the level of general ideas and who can tunnel down to the principles which govern human conduct. Yet conversation displays itself to best advantage only when the participants are willing to deal with ideas, rather than with persons and things,—altho without neglecting these. Not only must they be willing to do this, they must also be capable of it. They need a broad basis of knowledge as well as a shrewd understanding of human nature and of the interplay of the social forces.

When the requirements and conditions of genuine conversation are clearly apprehended, we need not be surprised that it is a rarity today and that it always has been a rarity. And we can appreciate the full meaning of Holmes's assertion in the 'Autocrat of the Breakfast Table'—that "talking is one of the fine arts,—the noblest, the most important, the most difficult,—and its fluent harmonies may be spoiled by the intrusion of a single harsh note."

(1910.)

X

THE GENTLE ART OF REPARTEE

X

THE GENTLE ART OF REPARTEE

I

DOCTOR HOLMES once declared that the bound volumes of comic papers were "cemeteries of hilarity, interspersed with cenotaphs of wit and humor." Probably he would have admitted that only the cypress and the yew could supply appropriate shelving for the second-rate comic plays of the immediate past, brisk enough in the performance not so very long ago, and yet sadly old-fashioned now that our taste in jokes has changed. Still, a wise word or a witty may be gleaned even from these forlorn pieces, which we may dismiss with what the colored gentleman aptly called "despisery." In a forgotten English comedy of the second half of the nineteenth century, a man, describing the only kind of woman he would be willing to marry, asserted that she must be a clever woman, a very clever woman—"a woman clever enough to begin a conversation with a repartee!" This is evidence that bachelors are ever unreasonable in the demands they make upon

spinsters, since there never was a woman clever enough to open a conversation with a retort. Any dictionary will remind us that a mere smart saying, a glittering epigram, a brilliant witticism, is not entitled to be received as a repartee unless it is a rejoinder. The exact definition of repartee is "a clever, ready, and witty retort."

In one of the Leatherstocking tales, Cooper narrates that Natty Bumppo was engaged in single combat with an adroit Indian foe, and that the redskin finally cast his tomahawk at the white hunter. Leatherstocking swiftly stepped aside, and with inconceivable dexterity caught the glittering weapon as it flew through the air, and with unerring aim hurled it back, to sink into the brain of his supple enemy. That was a true repartee—the rejoinder of the backwoods, the retort in kind, which closes a conversation and renders all further discussion unnecessary. It is therefore quite different from Leatherstocking's marvelous feats of marksmanship, when he drew a bead on a distant foe and dropped him in his tracks before the enemy knew what had hit him.

If we accept this distinction, as I think we must, we are forced to rule out a host of unexpected witticisms, spontaneously generated, and yet devoid of this element of rejoinder. They

may be as rapid and as recreative as the true repartee, but they lack this necessary element of self-defense, of legitimate reprisal. Congreve once told Colley Cibber that there were many witty speeches in one of Cibber's comedies, and also many speeches that looked witty and yet were not really what they seemed at first sight. So there are delightfully sudden flashes of wit which look like repartees, and yet are not when they are examined more closely. They are none the less delightful, but they are to be classified under another head. Here is an example of the instantaneous quip which is not a true repartee, felicitous as it is. Some years ago a friend of Mr. Oliver Herford's was going to Europe on the "Celtic," and the evening before his departure Mr. Herford called him up on the telephone to say good-by. He asked what ship his friend was going on, and some imp of the perverse prompted the friend to answer that he was sailing on the "Keltic." Mr. Herford promptly responded, "Don't say that, or you will have a hard C all the way across!"

We come a little closer to the genuine rejoinder, and again without attaining it, in a sharp turn attributed to Voltaire. That arch-wit was once speaking in praise of a certain contemporary man of letters, and a bystander remarked that it was very good of M. de Vol-

taire to say pleasant things of this man, since he was always saying unpleasant things of Voltaire; whereupon Voltaire smiled sweetly and suggested, "Perhaps we are both of us mistaken." This may be accepted as a retort to an absent adversary. It has the obvious element of self-defense, which is ever the essential quality of the true repartee, and it recalls the wise saying that it is the man who returns the first blow that begins the quarrel.

Voltaire's rejoinder is characteristically neat. It has the dexterity of the Oriental executioner, who seemed only to be flourishing his sword until he presented his snuff-box, whereupon the victim promptly sneezed his amputated head from his unsuspecting shoulders. It is in marked contrast to the surly brutality of Doctor Johnson's verbal boxing. After all, the proper weapon for the accomplished master of fence is the delicate duelling-sword and not the bludgeon or the boomerang, even if these more vulgar instruments may also be wielded with deadly effect. At bottom, what gives to the true repartee its utmost effect is the fact that the enginer has been hoist by his own petard; he is summarily disposed of while the rest of us are dazzled by the unforeseen sparks of the explosion.

Speaker Reed was once discussing the merits of President Harrison with a fellow-congress-

man, who, remembering that Reed's well-known dislike of the President was heightened by the fact that in the appointment of a collector of the port of Portland Reed's candidate had been turned down in favor of the Maine senator's, said:

"Of course, Mr. Reed, I know that Mr. Harrison can't say 'No' gracefully."

At which Reed flashed out: "Oh, it's worse than that. He can't say 'Yes' gracefully."

The mention of Reed leads naturally to the mention of Bismarck, also a master of debate in his own lordly fashion. In the days when the Seven Weeks' War with Austria was already looming in the distance, a French minister at one of the German courts protested against Prussia's conduct and warned Bismarck that, if it continued, it would lead Prussia straight to Jena. Bismarck looked the Frenchman in the eye and asked the simple question, "Why not to Waterloo?"

In like manner the mention of Waterloo leads naturally to the mention of Napoleon and Talleyrand, who were necessary to each other, but who crossed swords often, none the less. When Talleyrand was created Prince of Bénévent, he presented his wife to the emperor. Napoleon knew that the new princess resembled the heroine of the modern problem-play in that she was

A lady with a record
Whose career was rather checkered,

so he expressed his hope that her conduct in the future would be in accord with her exalted rank. And Talleyrand bowed, and responded that Mme. de Talleyrand would undoubtedly pattern her conduct on that of the empress. He knew, and he knew that Napoleon knew that he knew, how much scandal had attached to the conduct of Josephine even after she had married Napoleon.

In one of the bitter scenes of altercation which were not infrequent between Napoleon and his indispensable minister, the emperor declared that Talleyrand probably expected to be chief of the regency if Napoleon died. "But remember this," threatened the irate sovereign, "if I fall dangerously ill, you will be dead before me." And Talleyrand bowed ceremoniously and answered, "Sire, I did not need this warning to address to heaven my most ardent wishes for the conservation of Your Majesty's health."

On another occasion Talleyrand heard a certain general talking contemptuously of a class of persons whom he designated as *pékins*. Talleyrand asked who were the creatures so curtly dismissed as unworthy of regard. The general gladly explained that, "We soldiers call

everybody a *pékin* who is not military." And Talleyrand accepted the explanation with his usual suavity. "I see," he said, "it is just like what we do when we call anybody military who is not civil."

Many of the best of Talleyrand's good things are to be classed as true repartee; but on occasion he was tempted by his readiness of wit to puncture pretenders even when he himself had not been attacked. When a silly young fellow, seated between Mme. de Staël and Mme. Récamier, had the folly to insult both ladies by the remark that he was now between wit and beauty, Talleyrand could not resist the temptation. "Yes," he remarked, "and without possessing either." At first glance this may look like an unprovoked assault; and yet it may really be defended as a repartee, since it was due to the desire to avenge a thoughtless slur on two ladies to whom he was greatly attracted. Indeed, Mme. de Staël, when she was most intimate with Talleyrand, was not a little jealous of Mme. Récamier. Once she inquired of Talleyrand which of them he would fish out of the water if she and Mme. Récamier happened to fall in at the same time. And again Talleyrand was equal to the occasion. With his most flattering smile he replied, "Ah, Madame, you swim so well."

II

THERE is a charming subtlety about this which seems characteristically French. Yet we can now and again attain to an easy felicity that a Frenchman might envy. When the late Maurice Barrymore was once holding forth with his exuberant humor, an intoxicated bystander rudely interrupted by crying out, "You're a liar!" Barrymore was known to be a handy man with his fists, and the spectators expected a swift blow from the shoulder. It came only from the lips. Barrymore saw the man's condition, and with a light laugh responded, "Surely not—if *you* say so!"

This may be accepted as the repartee in all its nakedness. In fact, the repartee is almost always an ingenious variation of the everlasting retort, "You're another!" It is contained in its simplest form in the ancient and honorable dialogue which begins, "You're no gentleman!" and which ends, "You're no judge!" There is a variant of this which describes the fisticuffs of two rude fellows of the baser sort, one of whom is heard to declare, "I'll learn you to behave like a gentleman!" whereat the other insists, "I defy you to do it." And we may discover an analogy between these two masculine rep-

artees and a feminine repartee credited to a British suffragette. A puny male offensively thrust himself forward and interrupted the lady's eloquent address with the irrelevant query, "Wouldn't you jolly well like to be a man?" And the champion of the fair sex instantly proved its superiority by the counter-question, "Wouldn't you?"

By the side of this intersexual retort may be placed several international repartees, all credited to that anonymous but fascinating entity, the American Girl. Once when a Beef-eater at the Tower of London was displaying its treasures to a party of transatlantic pilgrims, he drew special attention to a certain gun, "captured at the battle of Bunker Hill, ladies and gentlemen!" And then the American Girl rose to the occasion. "I see," she said meekly, "you have the cannon, and we have the hill." This is perhaps a little sharper and less obvious than another of her retorts, called forth by the remark of an English lady to the effect that she could see "no reason why you Americans seem to think so much of your own country." Then the American Girl replied languidly, "I suppose it must be because we have seen some of the other countries." Closely akin to this is her swift response to another British dame who had read in the London papers horrible details about

evil doings in the United States and who was thereby moved to suggest that if things did not improve, it might be necessary to send over an army to chastise us. Whereupon the American Girl affected surprise and asked, "What—again?"

When Oscar Wilde came to the United States to lecture on esthetics in his highly esthetic velvet costume,—and incidentally to prepare the public mind for the proper appreciation of Gilbert and Sullivan's 'Patience,' in which the esthetic movement was held up to ridicule,—he used to complain that America was very uninteresting since it had "no antiquities and no curiosities." But he ventured on this disparagement once too often, for in the course of his travels he uttered it to the American Girl, and she replied with the demure depravity of candid innocence that this was not quite a fair reproach, since "we shall have the antiquities in time, and we are already importing the curiosities."

Lamb once declared that it was some compensation for growing old that in his youth he had seen the 'School for Scandal' acted by the incomparable cast that illuminated the original performance; and perhaps the present writer may discover a like compensation in the fact that he can recall the elder Sothern's rich and mellow rendering of the 'Crushed Tragedian.'

Hazlitt—writing, it is true, before the full flowering of the modern novel—asserted that "to read a good comedy is to keep the best company in the world, where the best things are said and the most amusing happen." Yet even better than the reading of a good comedy, entertaining as that may be, is the recalling of its performance, with the echo of its best things in our ears and with the memory of its amusing happenings rising unbidden before our eyes. The 'Crushed Tragedian' was not a very good comedy, taken as a whole; but Sothern's performance of the broken-down old actor was a delight that no one who ever enjoyed it would willingly forget. Rising on the top wave of joyous recollection is the superb attitude of triumph assumed by Sothern as the old actor transfixes one of the other characters with what he believes to be a master stroke of repartee. The other character is an old banker, who, when he learns that Sothern is an actor, makes the lordly remark that "it is twenty years since I have been in a theater." This gives the crushed tragedian his chance, and with immense scorn he hurls back the withering words, "It is about the same time since *I* have been in a *bank!*"

This is transcendental in its sublimity. It is very much more felicitous than the more obvious rejoinder in one of Augier's comedies, in

the course of which two friends discover that they have made a mistake. "What fools we have been!" one of them admits; and the other, a little nettled, replies, "Put that in the singular." "Certainly," the first retorts; "what a fool *you* have been!" Obvious as this is, and inexpensive as it must be considered, it falls completely within the definition of the repartee. Not a few other examples might be picked from the pages of the younger Dumas and Beaumarchais, as well as from those of Sheridan and Congreve. Perhaps it is because actors are in the habit of taking part in the amusing happenings of good comedies, and of uttering the good things prepared for them by the authors, that they are encouraged to achieve good things of their own. During the run of the 'Blue Bird' in New York last winter, a friend of the late Jacob Wendell (who played the part of the faithful Dog in Maeterlinck's fairy allegory) met him at The Players. This friend praised Wendell's performance of the canine character, with the sole reservation of the barking. That, the volunteer critic insisted, was not so true to life as it should be; he declared finally, "I could just naturally bark better than that myself." And Wendell gravely expostulated, "Ah, but, you see, I had to learn *my* bark."

III

THIS may be taken as an example of the retort courteous, altho it is not as gentle as one of Thackeray's. When the novelist made his single attempt to be elected to Parliament, he happened one day to meet the rival candidate, who parted from him with the familiar Anglo-Saxon phrase, "May the best man win!" To this Thackeray instantly responded, "I hope *not!*" Thackeray's collaborator in the pages of *Punch*, Douglas Jerrold, was incapable of a suave rejoinder of this sort. Jerrold was in fact a little like Doctor Johnson, in his disregard for the feelings of others and in his willingness to give pain for the pleasure of his own wit. When Bentley the publisher told Jerrold that he had at first intended to call his new magazine the *Wit's Miscellany* but had finally decided to style it *Bentley's Miscellany*, Jerrold smiled bitterly and said, "Well, you needn't have gone to the other extreme." This is not a true repartee, since it was wholly gratuitous, being entirely without provocation.

The sole justification for the bold retort is that it is a weapon of self-defense. Tennyson, so we were told, used to delight in narrating a rejoinder of a certain more or less disreputable

man about town, named Trumpington, who was a crony of George IV. Once when the king came down to a seaside resort, he met his friend with the remark, "I hear you are the biggest blackguard in the place." And Trumpington bowed and responded, "I hope Your Majesty has not come down here to take away my character." By the side of this may be put a remark of Ben Butler's during the Crédit Mobilier debate of 1873, perhaps not strictly a repartee by the definition insisted upon in these pages, and yet so near to the margin of the definition that it deserves mention here. Butler had objected to an elaborate and unduly distended speech of an opponent, who expostulated with the plea that he had expected to divide time with the honorable gentleman opposite. To this Butler retorted: "Divide time? It looks to me more like dividing eternity."

There is an epigram often attributed to Sheridan, but really composed by Lewis, the author of the 'Monk,' which preserves in rime a repartee that may have been due originally to Sheridan himself:

> Lord Erskine, at woman presuming to rail,
> Called a wife, "a tin canister tied to one's tail."
> And fair Lady Anne, while the subject he carries on,
> Seems hurt by his lordship's degrading comparison.
> But wherefore degrading? Considered aright,

A canister's useful and polished and bright;
And should dirt its original purity hide—
That's the fault of the puppy to whom it is tied.

On one occasion, at least, Sheridan and Lewis sparred, and the author of the 'School for Scandal' countered neatly on the author of the 'Castle Specter.' This last piece was a tawdry melodrama which had proved very attractive at Drury Lane, although it had not brought to Lewis what he believed to be a proportionate share of its profits. By chance the manager and the author had a dispute about some question of the hour, and Lewis offered to back his opinion with a bet. "I'll make a big bet," he cried; "I'll bet you what you have made by my play." "No," retorted Sheridan, "I'll make only a little bet. I'll bet you what your play is really worth."

It is an interesting fact that Sheridan, prodigal as he was of wit, in life as in literature, was sparing of repartee, or at least that his repartee was rarely or never offensive. His humor was good humor also, and that can rarely be said of a wit. Moore, in his memorial poem, declared that Sheridan's wit

Ne'er carried a heart-stain away on its blade.

Sheridan was liked by those he laughed at. He was that rare character, a wit, ready at

repartee, and yet not feared. He was popular, notwithstanding Chesterfield's wise remark that to be known as a wit "is a very unpopular denomination, as it carries terror along with it; and people in general are as much afraid of a live wit, in company, as a woman is of a gun, which she thinks may go off of itself and do her a mischief." If wit is a gun, repartee is sometimes a gun that kicks and sorely bruises the shoulder of him who fires it. A weapon of self-defense it may be, but, like other weapons, it sometimes proves a dangerous possession. Perhaps a time may come when men will not be allowed to carry wit concealed about their persons without a special permit from the municipal authorities, to be granted only to those who can bring testimonials to the gentleness of their character.

(1912.)

XI

COSMOPOLITAN COOKERY

XI

COSMOPOLITAN COOKERY

I

NOT long ago I chanced to see in a New York newspaper a doleful letter from a British subject temporarily marooned on Manhattan Island in which he deplored and denounced American cookery. He went so far as to deny us any skill whatever in the art without which men may not live. As I read this perfervid epistle, due, it may be, to the indigestion provoked by the fried beefsteak in a one-night-town hotel, I smiled at the memory of other and equally unrestrained outcries which I had heard from Americans in Paris, protesting that they couldn't get anything fit to eat in the City of Light. These wandering fellow-countrymen of mine felt themselves defrauded at being unable to order corn-bread and beaten biscuit, codfish-balls and buckwheat-cakes, when they sat themselves down in the breakfast-room of their Parisian hotel.

Recalling these Yankee ululations I understood the cockney wails, and I wondered what British dainty it was that the straying Londoner

had failed to find in New York. Was it veal-and-ham pie, that substantial solid, or jugged hare, that unspeakable delicacy? And there came to mind also a recollection of a bitter protest I had once heard from the lips of a Parisian who was spending a miserable fortnight in London, and who was vociferous (beyond the habit of his courteous countrymen) in his denunciation of those twin-delights of the English dinner-table, the mint-sauce with which the British desecrate their otherwise excellent roast lamb and the bread-sauce with which they contaminate their otherwise excellent partridge. This exacerbated Frenchman declared that these two aids to indigestion were indefensible outrages on the gustatory organs and on the alimentary canal.

It is difficult not to sympathize more or less with any fellow human being let loose in a foreign land, deprived of the dishes to which he is accustomed and offended by culinary offerings from which his stomach revolts. Yet it is difficult also not to confess that the woful complaint of the wandering stranger, be he Briton in the United States, American in France, or Frenchman in the British Isles, is really unreasonable. There is no cosmopolitan standard of right and wrong in gastronomic esthetics. If jugged hare and veal-and-ham pie, sauce made of mint and sauce mashed out of bread happen to please the

palates of the British, who shall deny them the privilege of compounding these delectable dishes? *Caveat emptor*—let the foreigner beware. It is for him to guard himself against insidious results to his digestive habits. Every country has the dishes it desires; and the wanderer will do well to experiment cautiously and to be guided thereafter by this experience. None but the brave deserve the fare that will satisfy their appetites. The one wise plan is to pick out of the local dietary the few (or the many) articles which may please (or at least not offend) our own likings, resolutely rejecting all alien dishes offensive to our taste, no matter how volubly these outlandish offerings may be vaunted by their vendors. There is no more obligation upon a Frenchman in Scotland to partake of haggis, than there is upon a Scot in Paris to make a meal on frogs' legs.

It is wise also to recognize the fact that the cooking of every country has merits of its own, if only we are open-minded enough to perceive them. It is well for the untraveled American in Paris to forego the hope and expectation of chicken fried in cream, Maryland style; and to risk himself in the exploration of *poulet sauté à la Marengo;* probably he will not regret this gastronomic substitution. It is well also for the intrepid English voyager, surveying the United

States from a car-window, to overcome his first impression and to taste terrapin, for he may find it "not half so nasty as it looks,"—as the Reverend Mr. Haweis once assured his wife. And even the Gaul, ill at ease in Great Britain, will profit by the willingness to live and learn and by the courage which sustains faith; he may come in time to a keen appreciation of the chump-chop, an article of food which is truly insular, since in shape it looks very like a map of England. For the hardy traveler in foreign parts, risking himself in strange restaurants with unknown names on the bill of fare, there is no better motto than "nothing venture, nothing have."

"A difference of taste in jests is a great strain on the affections," said George Eliot; and so is a difference in taste in dishes. Tell me what a man laughs at and I will tell you what he is; tell me also what he eats, and I can at least make a guess as to what manner of man he is. Perhaps there is here a suggestion for the League of Nations; and one clause of the covenant might assert the right of every country to exercise self-determination in all matters of cookery. The signers of this treaty of peace must remember that as French is still the language of diplomacy, so also is the cookery of France still the standard by which that of other countries is measured;

and the friendly foreigners invading Paris will do well to try modestly to discover the reason why the culinary artists of France are justly entitled *chefs*.

II

In his most suggestive discussion of 'Food and Feeding,' the late Sir Henry Thompson—the distinguished surgeon of London, celebrated also for his "octaves," as he called his little dinners of eight—pointed out clearly the essential difference between the racial cookery of the French and that of the English. The British Isles have a damp climate, with frequent rain, resulting in luxuriant grass which provides an ideal provender for cattle. So it is that in England beef and mutton are likely to be the best of their kind; and therefore the British cook's sole duty is to present these meats unadorned so that the full flavor of the flesh may be preserved. This is to say that the proper effort of the British artist in the kitchen is directed toward the stark simplicity which gives us plain roast beef and plain roast lamb, the naked beefsteak and the unclothed mutton chop, the bare pheasant and the bare haunch of venison, each of them sufficient unto itself and not needing any auxiliary sauce. British cookery at its best is beauty unadorned.

France is less rainy, and the breeding of cattle has not been so careful there as it has been in England, with the result that beef and mutton are likely to be somewhat inferior; and therefore it is the prime duty of the French artist in the kitchen to stimulate the appetite and help it to be satisfied with meats which may be a little tough and even stringy. What is true of beef and mutton is true also of fish. Paris is three or four hours from the sea and fish does not always arrive there in the most perfect condition; and therefore the cook is tempted to disguise a possible lack of freshness by the piquancy of his sauces. London, on the other hand, is in fact what the American schoolgirl declared it to be in her geography examination; London is "the capital of a small island off the coast of France." Because it is the capital of a small island, "set in a silver sea," London gets its fish in the best possible condition; and therefore it is the duty of the English cook to present fish with the inexorable simplicity with which she presents beef and mutton. Woe betide her if she venture upon any alien sauce! That way madness lies!

It is the old antithesis between art and nature. The British cook is excellent when she lets well enough alone; and the French cook is wise in his generation when he makes the best

of the material at his disposition. "There are nine-and-sixty ways of writing tribal lays; and every single one of them is right." The best-trained palate will find it difficult to declare which is the more truly satisfactory, the simple fried sole which one can count upon anywhere and everywhere in England and the more complicated *Sole Marguéry* or *Sole Mornay*, final rewards of a visit to Paris. So it is impossible to accord precedence either to the roast beef of old England or to the *filet Chateaubriand* of France, when this latter dish is truly what it pretends to be,—that is to say, when a thick tenderloin has been broiled between two slices of inferior beef, thus retaining all its own juice and even absorbing that of its twin coverings.

In France cookery (like millinery) is one of the fine arts; and art is long. Complaint is made in Paris that the culinary art is falling from the high estate to which it had attained in the nineteenth century. For this decadence,—if decadence there be,—we are supplied with two reasons. First, because the cooks themselves are in a hurry to reap the reward of the artist, and are not now willing to serve the long and arduous apprenticeship which is the only road to a complete mastery of the mysteries of the craft. And, second, because the public is also in a hurry, indisposed to order in advance and

so to allow the full time necessary for the preparation of a gastronomic masterpiece. Of course, the foreigners who flock to Paris to get their fill of esthetic sensations are the worst offenders; but even the Parisians themselves are unreasonable in speeding up the artist and in thus compelling him to improvise, as it were, to risk a hit-or-miss effect, instead of achieving the flawless execution of a premeditated and perfectly combined bill of fare.

French cookery also suffers in another way from the invasion of the barbarians. It is in Paris that the culinary art has attained to its culmination and achieved the apex of its glory; it is only in Paris that the student of high aspiration and of ample inspiration can acquire its ultimate secrets. But we all know that there are now abroad in the world a host of "French cooks," falsely so called, who have never studied in the French capital and who are not even French,—being therefore devoid of the innate gift of the Gaul. These out-landers, if we may so term them, these intruders into the temple, are likely to lack both the native endowment and the solid instruction without which there is only vanity and vexation of spirit. They may on occasion cling to the letter of the law; but they are wanting in understanding of its soul.

III

I HAVE sought to show that if the Parisian despises the cookery of the Londoner, it is because he has failed to appreciate its peculiar excellence, that is to say its simplicity. And it would not be more difficult to explain that the Englishman is in error when he condemns the cookery of the American. There is bad cooking a plenty in the United States, as there is also in Great Britain; often due to an ignorant effort to imitate the inimitable art of the French. But just as English cooking is good when it conforms to its own traditions, so American cookery can be excellent in its own way. Is the *bouillabaisse* of Marseilles really more alluring than the clam chowder of Cape Cod?

Of course, if the French and British travelers in the United States expect to get their own special culinary successes, they are foredoomed to disappointment We cannot set before them either fried sole or *sole Mornay*, because unkind fate has deprived us of the sole itself. But we can proffer to them the planked shad—"and what better dish can there be?" We may go further and ask if any venturesome alien has really the right to look down on one of the humblest of our dishes, corned beef hash, when it

has been compounded by competent hands? And who shall decry the equally humble codfish-ball, when its flattened globe is the work of a born cook? It is our misfortune now that we can no longer rest our case on the canvas-back duck of sainted memory, departed and deeply mourned and so nearly forgotten that the tale is told of a Londoner, at his first dinner in a New York hotel, asking for "the celebrated canvas-back clam."

I doubt if any one has yet done justice to the variety and to the merit of our sweet dishes. Has any other country in the world anything to compare with the strawberry short-cake, when it is truly short-cake and not sponge-cake, when it is deluged with real cream and not desecrated with whipped cream? And consider for a moment that invention of the Puritans and the Pilgrim Fathers, baked Indian pudding, with its indigenous flavor enhanced by hard sauce. The Pilgrim Mother who originated that abiding delight deserves a monument more enduring than brass; and yet, sad to relate, this truly American invention is unknown to the benighted Britons—that is, if we may believe the possibly apocryphal tale of the English lady who protested when she first heard of this dish,—"Baked *Indian?* How horrible! I knew you Americans

were savages—but I didn't suspect that you were cannibals!"

Then there are our pies, unhonored and unsung,—except by Eugene Field who once rimed a lilting lyric in praise of 'Apple Pie and Cheese':

Full many a sinful notion
  Conceived of foreign powers
Has come across the ocean
  To harm this land of ours;
And heresies called fashions
  Have modesty effaced,
And baleful, morbid passions
  Corrupt our native taste.
O tempora! O mores!
  What profanations these
That seek to dim the glories
  Of Apple Pie and Cheese.

The American apple pie is not the British apple-tart,—far from it. In fact the British apple-tart is closely akin to what we know as the "deep dish apple pie." Nor is the American apple pie at all like the French *tourte aux pommes* which is a thin circular disk, with a raised rim and no upper crust. The American lemon meringue pie has been degraded and disgraced by base and fraudulent imitations, seemingly concocted out of glue and soapsuds and shoe leather; but when it has been created by an inspired ebony artist with kinky curls bound up in a bandanna, it is indeed a good

creature. And there is punkin pie, scorned by the highbrow but none the less welcome when it also is due to the deft touch of a sable craftswoman. A friend of mine, long deprived of this delicacy, dear to his New England boyhood, recently saw it upon the bill of fare of one of the fashionable hotels of New York; and he was about to order it when he hesitated in doubt whether its adequate preparation was a possible feat for the presumably French pastry-cook of that sumptuous hostelry. He was promptly reassured by the headwaiter: "We have an American to make our punkin pies, and what's more, he's a coon!"

I confess that I wish I knew which pie it was, punkin or apple, lemon meringue or mince, that Emerson ordered on his trip to California, evoking from a young lady in the party the surprised question, "Why, Mr. Emerson, do *you* eat pie?" To which the benignant philosopher is recorded to have responded, "My dear young lady, what is pie for?"

We do not often pause to recall the variety of the foodstuffs unknown to Europe until after Columbus had returned from his venturesome voyage across the Western Ocean. There is tobacco, if that can be called a foodstuff (which may be doubtful); no European or Asiatic or African could smoke until the Nicotian weed

had been acclimated. There is the sugar-cane; no Greek and no Roman could put sugar in his beverages until after a method had been discovered for making it out of the juice of the cane; and the Roman and the Greek could enjoy only such sweet dishes as might be sweetened by honey. Even to this day maple-sugar is almost unknown in Europe; indeed it is so little known that Thackeray in the first edition of the 'Virginians,' did not hesitate to describe it as being garnered in the autumn! There is the tomato also, and the potato and the turkey (falsely believed to have come from the country from which it borrowed its name).

There is maize, which we call Indian corn and which is our most important food-crop, more important even than wheat. It is used by the English only rarely, under the name of corn-flour; and it is so unfamiliar to the Irish that when cargoes of it were sent over from America during the famine, the peasants died because they did not know how to make bread from what they termed "yellow meal." Only in Italy has Indian corn been made as useful as in its native land. Apparently the Italians have never learnt how to prepare corn-bread; but one of the most popular dishes of the peasantry is *polenta*, which is their equivalent for our hasty pudding. When Joel Barlow was wandering

around Europe a century ago he recognized our homely American dish; and he sang its praises in his unpretending poem, the 'Hasty Pudding,' which lingers now in many a memory ignorant of his ambitious epic, the 'Columbiad':

> The sweets of Hasty Pudding. Come, dear bowl,
> Guide o'er my palate, and inspire my soul!
> The milk beside thee, smoking from the kine,
> Its substance mingle, married in with thine,
> Shall cool and temper the superior heat,
> And save the pains of blowing while I eat.
> . . . . . .
> But man, more fickle, the bold license claims,
> In different realms to give thee different names.
> Thee the soft nations round the warm Levant
> *Polenta* call; the French of course, *polente*.
> E'en in thy native regions now, I blush
> To hear the Pennsylvanians call thee *Mush!*
> On Hudson's banks, where men of Belgic spawn
> Insult and eat thee by the name *Suppawn*.
> All spurious appellations, void of truth;
> I've better known thee from my earliest youth—
> Thy name is *Hasty Pudding!* Thus my sire
> Was wont to greet thee, fuming from his fire!

IV

Christmas cheer comes once a year, so the old saying asserted. But will it come even once, now that we are in the fell clutch of prohibition? Will Christmas be as cheerful as it used to be,

when the mince-pie lacks its full flavor and when the blue flame will never again flicker about the base of the plum pudding? If our island ancestors had voted England dry a century ago, Washington Irving could never have written his appetizing account of the Christmas dinner; and Charles Dickens would not have been able to take the hint from his American predecessor, and to interlard his bold and broad narratives with incessant descriptions of eating and drinking. How many hearty feasts Dickens set before his readers with unfailing gusto!

Doctor Holmes declared that we could gage the rate of respiration of the poets by noting the meters they severally preferred; the writers of octosyllabic verse being swifter breathers than their brethren who chose the stately and straight-backed pentameter. Perhaps we can guess at the relative digestive apparatus of the novelists by the frequency with which they deal with foods and feeding. Who can doubt that Dickens had a stout stomach and that he was a trencherman to be compared only with Rabelais? And Thackeray was the author of 'Memorials of Gormandizing.' The records of the repasts we find in many an English novel make our mouths water; and even the poets have left us carols of cookery and recipes in rime,—of which latter the most famous is Sydney Smith's recipe for a

salad; with the sublime assurance in its final quatrain:

Then tho green turtle fail, tho venison's tough,
And ham and turkey are not boiled enough,
Serenely full the epicure may say,
"Fate cannot harm me—I have dined to-day!"

Yet we cannot disguise the fact that there is monotony in the menu, that our meals lack variety whatever the skill of our cooks, that we are confined to the flesh of bipeds and of quadrupeds,—except when we prefer the footless fish. A new dish is as great a variety as a new sin. There are now no new worlds for the gastronomic traveller to explore. We do not crave the blubber, dear to the dwellers near the North Pole; nor can darkest Africa provide us with the baked elephant's foot, which I have longed to taste ever since my early boyhood, when I read about it in Ballantyne's 'Gorilla Hunters.' And in those same youthful years I wanted a slice of buffalo-hump, a delicacy now impossible of attainment, altho it was an everyday dish for the heroes of Edward S. Ellis's dime novels, which delighted the hearts of the lads of my time.

Here in America we have lost the canvas-back duck; and we have never had the sole. We may read about them; we may peruse the text-

books which prescribe the proper methods of cooking them; but we cannot hope to feed on them. Still, there is comfort of a kind in the cook-books themselves. Age cannot stale them nor custom wither their infinite variety. There was a picture in *Punch* long, long ago, which showed us a Lady Bountiful visiting one of her pensioners and asking if this dilapidated old woman had read a cook-book which had been bestowed upon her. And to this question the pensioner responded, "Yes, my lady, I read it, —but I'd rather have had the ingridiments."

In default of the ingredients, we must seek solace in the cook-book itself, not so nourishing it may be, yet awakening delectable memories. She was a sensible person, that impoverished gentlewoman, who had trained herself to find satisfaction in sipping her tea and munching her toast, while she gave a loose to her imagination by reading the recipes of the most expensive dishes as amply written out by a former chief of the kitchen of Her Majesty, Queen of England and Empress of India.

(1919.)

XII

ON WORKING TOO MUCH AND WORKING TOO FAST

XII

ON WORKING TOO MUCH AND WORKING TOO FAST

I

I HAVE recently read an article in which it was asserted that American fiction is in a parlous state, because our story-tellers write too much and write too fast; and I am moved to file a protest. I dispute the assertion, and I decry the validity of the reasons advanced in support of it.

First of all we need to remember always that contemporary criticism about contemporary literature is very rarely important or significant. We cannot see the forest for the trees; we lack the perspective of time; we are unable to anticipate the ultimate result of the slow but sure process of selection which separates the chaff from the wheat and which results in casting aside a host of writers often of a salient prominence in the eyes of their immediate contemporaries. We may, every one of us, have our individual opinion as to the probable permanence of present-day reputations; but we can, no one of

us, feel any certainty that this individual opinion is going to be justified by the communal decision of the next generation. The writers whom we acclaim loudly may be lost to sight beneath the wave of oblivion half a century from now; and the writers to whom we do not deign to give a thought may then have proved themselves to be possessed of the one thing necessary for survival. 'Robinson Crusoe' and 'Pilgrim's Progress' won instant popularity, yet they were altogether ignored by the self-appointed dispensers of critical approval.

Sir Philip Sidney thought that the English drama was beneath contempt; and it was just about to flower out exuberantly. Guy Patin thought that the French drama was in a very lamentable condition; and it had just been illumined by the masterpieces of Corneille, Molière and Racine. In the late Professor Lounsbury's posthumous history of the 'Life and Times of Tennyson,' there is this quotation from Macaulay's diary, under date of March 9, 1850: "It is odd that the last twenty-five years which have witnessed the greatest progress ever made in physical science—the greatest victories ever achieved by mind over matter—should have produced hardly a volume that will be remembered in 1900." And Lounsbury follows this with another quotation from a letter of Macau-

lay's written a few months later, in which the writer declared that Sir Henry Taylor's 'Philip Van Artevelde' "is still, in my opinion, the best poem that the last thirty years have produced." Then Professor Lounsbury asked: "Could a more suggestive illustration be furnished of the worthlessness of contemporary criticism of the productions of the imagination? The quarter of a century, whose intellectual poverty was so strongly pointed out by Macaulay, had witnessed the production of much of the best work of both Tennyson and Browning in poetry; of Dickens and Thackeray and Carlyle in prose; not to speak of no small number of writers like Bulwer, Disraeli, Kingsley and others who still continue to be remembered and read."

When men of the acumen and authority of Sidney, Guy Patin, and Macaulay have thus revealed their inability to see what was before their eyes, modesty suggests that those of us who are less amply endowed with vision should be cautious in expressing confidence in our own insight in regard to our immediate contemporaries. Especially ought we to be careful not to let our keen perception of the manifest and manifold defects in the average novel blind us to the probability that there are also not a few novels above the average and free from the more glaring of these deficiencies. There is no need

to deny that the average American novel of today is a poor thing; so is the average British novel; so is the average French novel; and so was the average American and British and French novel of the last generation and of the generation before the last. The immense majority of contemporary novels in any language and in any epoch are for immediate consumption only. They serve their temporary purpose, well or ill; and then they are forgotten, as their places are taken by other novels, no better and no worse.

It is quite possible that at the present moment American fiction is in the trough of the waves and that we do not happen to possess just now any writer of fiction whose work will be cherished fifty years hence. And on the other hand it is also possible, indeed it is highly probable, that more than one of the novels produced here in the United States in the first fifteen years of this twentieth century will emerge triumphant from out of the watery waste of the average novel of this decade and a half.

II

But whether or not our story-tellers are as unsatisfactory as was alleged in the article I had read, there is no reason for accepting the ex-

planation that their failure is due to undue haste and to undue productivity. Underlying this explanation is the unexpressed conviction that the best work is possible only to those who labor slowly and to those who do not produce abundantly. This is an opinion cherished by many critics, who find justification for their faith in the fact that the most prolific authors are frequently also the most slovenly in style and the most happy-go-lucky in structure. No doubt, there are many works of fiction which would be better than they are if the author had taken more pains—and he might have taken more pains if he had taken more time.

Yet the more familiar we are with the history of literature and with the biography of authors, the less inclined we are to accept this view unreservedly. It is true that Time is jealous and is likely to destroy that which is done with his aid. It is true also that there is today as always a superabundance of hasty work turned out by writers who are rushing through the story they have in hand so that they can start as soon as possible on the story they have in mind. But it is not true that all the masters have written slowly and that they have produced only after a long and laborious gestation. Whatever categorical dogmatism may say to the contrary, it is a matter of common knowledge that fecundity

of production and swiftness of execution are often characteristics of genius—and even of talent.

Ben Jonson boasted that he had given two years to a single play; and two years was also the time which Ibsen devoted to each of his later social dramas. But Jonson and Ibsen, important as they are, do not rank with the supreme masters of the drama, Sophocles, Shakspere and Molière. "The dramatic activity of Sophocles extended over sixty-two years," so the late Professor Butcher recorded; and the greatest of Greek dramatists is believed to have composed one hundred and thirteen plays—very nearly two a year, a productivity four times that of Ibsen and Jonson. The dramatic activity of Shakspere extended over twenty years; and he wrote thirty-nine or forty plays—again about two a year. The dramatic activity of Molière extended over fifteen years, and he wrote about thirty plays—once more about two a year. The only deduction from these figures is obvious enough. Ben Jonson and Ibsen were right in taking two years to a play, because by so doing they were able to put forth their utmost strength; and Sophocles, Shakspere and Molière were also right in turning out two plays a year, because by so doing they were able to reveal more amply their more copious fecundity and their swifter certainty of execution.

The most popular play of the younger Dumas, the 'Dame aux Camélias,' was dramatised from his own story, in a single week; and the most popular play of Victor Hugo, 'Hernani,' with its sonorous and resplendent verse, was actually written—it had previously been plotted in a complete scenario—in exactly four weeks. Would either of these plays have been any better if it had cost its author the protracted labor of two years? It is current gossip that a prominent British novelist of our day wrote her stories seven times before she was satisfied to let them leave her hands. She might rewrite them seventy times seven without breathing the breath of life into her graven images; and the suggestion may be ventured that if she had dared to publish the first draft of any one of her devitalised revisions, perhaps it might have been found to disclose a spontaneity sadly lacking in her novels as we have been permitted to peruse them.

The writer of the article I had read soars into a dithyrambic rhapsody over the thirty years which Flaubert gave to 'Madame Bovary'; and there is no denying that 'Madame Bovary' is one of the many masterpieces of the art of fiction. But it is a masterpiece not solely or even chiefly because of its finish and its polish. No masterpiece has ever been achieved by the external accessories of finish and polish. Books cannot live

by style alone. 'Madame Bovary' is great primarily because of its content, of its author's inquest upon human nature, of his insight into character. Moreover, when all is said, 'Madame Bovary' is not easy reading—in the sense that 'Vanity Fair,' the 'Scarlet Letter,' and the 'Rise of Silas Lapham' are easy reading. It is a painful pleasure we take in its perusal; and the joyless toil that went to its making oppresses the reader, forced to share the sore travail of the author.

Every artist must obey the law of his own being. He can do his best only in accordance with the self-imposed restrictions which he has found to be most helpful. Only by infinite toil could Flaubert achieve the austere simplicity of 'Madame Bovary,' and therefore he was compelled to infinite toil. Because this meticulous method suited him, he sought to impose it upon Maupassant, to whose exuberant temperament it was entirely uncongenial. What the pupil retained from the master's teaching was an abiding respect for art, for the art of construction and for the art of writing. The personal method of the master the pupil rejected, fortunately for himself and for his readers. I have read somewhere that Maupassant once came downstairs to the mid-day breakfast with a smile of satisfaction on his face and said to his mother that he

had just made three hundred francs, explaining that he had written a short story, the 'Necklace.' Now, in its own way, 'La Parure' is as undeniably a masterpiece as 'Madame Bovary' itself.

Mr. Rudyard Kipling once told me that his amusing narrative of midnight misadventure, 'Brugglesmith,' had been conceived, composed, and completed on the evening of the day when he had heard from Mr. Oliver Herford the anecdote which suggested it. And Mr. Edwin Lefèvre informs me that he composed 'Woman and Her Bonds' at a single sitting and before breakfast. Now, 'Woman and Her Bonds' is the best of its author's 'Wall Street Stories'; it is one of the best of American short-stories, ingenious in invention, adroit in construction, swift in movement and clear in style.

It would be easy to heap up illustrations from the other arts to show that speed is not necessarily a danger. Mr. Sargent painted 'Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose' in one long English twilight and then scraped it off the next morning only to paint it again that afternoon and to remove it the following day, until after half-a-dozen sighting shots he hit the bull's eye and rested content with the result of the final evening's work. The 'Barber of Seville,' which has survived for now exactly a century, was composed

and produced in less than a month, after Rossini had composed and produced in the preceding month an opera which was an immediate and total failure. Verdi wrote 'Rigoletto' in six weeks; and Schubert wrote his song, the 'Erl König,' in one afternoon.

But there is no need to multiply illustrations. Fecundity and celerity of execution may be elements of strength. Many men of genius have produced abundantly, incessantly and swiftly. On the other hand, it does not follow that a man who produces abundantly, incessantly and swiftly is necessarily a man of genius. There are now, there always have been and there always will be, men who write too fast and who write too much, because they are writing chiefly with a desire to make money. These men write themselves out and they write themselves down; and there is no need to waste words over what they write or to reprove them for what they do and for how they do it. They are beneath criticism, not because they write too much and too fast or chiefly for money, but because they are what they are. Their failure is not due to a defective method; it is due to a deficient character.

After all, there are nine and sixty ways of writing tribal lays and every single one of them is right. Balzac drafted and amplified and

amended and was forever revising his proofs; and so best, since that was the process most profitable to him. Scott wrote at white heat, not knowing when he began where he was going to end; and so best again, since he was an improviser of genius, incapable of inexorable self-criticism. Either of these great novelists would have been wrong if he had tried to compel himself to work in accord with the method of the other.

So long as the barrel is full it does not matter whether the water is allowed to drip drop by drop from the spigot or whether it is permitted to gush generously from the bung-hole. And so long as the barrel is able to replenish itself unceasingly from the spring, it does not matter how frequently the water is drawn off.

(1916.)

XIII

THE MODERNITY OF MOLIÈRE

[This address was delivered in April, 1922, at a meeting of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, commemorating the three hundredth anniversary of the work of Molière and honored by the presence of two representatives of the Académie Française.]

XIII

THE MODERNITY OF MOLIÈRE

MONSIEUR DONNAY and Monsieur Chevrillon have come three thousand miles to take part in our tribute to the genius of a man who was born three hundred years ago. Our invitation and their crossing of the Atlantic bear witness to the fact that the fame of Molière is both enduring and world-wide. No one of the makers of French literature is more typically, more fundamentally French than he; and yet here, in a city almost unknown and absolutely unimportant three centuries ago, we are today assembled to do him honor and to acclaim him as the master of modern comedy.

He was not only a man of his own country, he was a man of his own time. In the early years of the long reign of Louis XIV he came a little later than Corneille and a little earlier than Racine; and neither of them is as representative of that glittering epoch as Molière;—and yet half-a-dozen or half-a-score of his thirty plays are alive today in all the freshness of their eternal youth. He is not for his own country alone

but for all civilization; and he was not for his own age only, but for ours also. To say this is to say that he possesses the two indispensable qualities of a classic: his masterpieces have a large measure of permanence and a large measure of universality.

I have studied him lovingly for half-a-century, and as I came to a more intimate acquaintance with his writings and to a keener appreciation of the man himself, I felt more and more the modernness of his work. No doubt, it bears unmistakably the impress of his own time,—all masterpieces do that, of course, those of Sophocles and Shakspere no less than those of Molière. Yet he is more modern than the great Greek tragedian who lived two thousand years ago, and more modern even than the great Englishman, who wrote both comedies and tragedies, and who died only six years before the great Frenchman was born. The great Spaniard Calderon survived Molière eight years; and his plays seem to us almost archaic in their stagecraft and in their spirit,—whereas the comedies of Molière are modern both in their form and in their content.

The modernity of his form is obvious enough, and he is the master of modern comedy, not only because he realized better than any predecessor in any country what the true province of

comedy was and what were its possibilities and its limitations but also because he wrote for the modern playhouse, with its roof, with its artificial lighting, with its scenery, with its seated spectators. The pattern he devised for this modern playhouse is the pattern employed by the playwrights of every European language, even though they may be totally unaware of the debt they owe to him. Shakspere's plays have to be modified to adjust themselves to our theaters; Molière's do not demand any rearrangement, not a single transposition nor a single omission. Sheridan could not have plotted the 'School for Scandal' if Molière had not plotted the 'Misanthrope' and the 'Femmes Savantes.' Ibsen could not have put together the 'League of Youth' and the 'Pillars of Society' if Molière had not devised 'Tartuffe.'

He had profited by his early study of Plautus and Terence, as they had profited by their study of Menander; but the Greek and the two Latins in their turn, had progressed only to the play of intrigue, the comedy of anecdote; they were not equipt to achieve the comedy of manners, the comedy of character, the social drama, the play which while it makes us laugh also makes us think. Their field was narrowly restricted and the hampering conditions of the social organization in Athens and in Rome did

not tempt them—indeed, did not permit them —to achieve a large and liberal treatment of human nature. Shakspere, as it happened, never undertook the comedy of manners which is also a comedy of character, perhaps because his social background did not supply the material for this special type of comedy. The London of the Virgin Queen lacked the urbanity of the Paris of the Grand Monarch. Elizabethan society was boisterous in speech and violent in temper; and therefore no one of Shakspere's ever delightful comedies, sometimes delicately romantic and sometimes robustly farcical, is a picture of the life of his own time and of his own country. Molière in four or six of his amplest and deepest comedies brings before us his own contemporaries as he had observed them in the city of his birth.

It was these contemporaries that Molière had to please, if he was to keep his theater open; and this is what every great dramatist has had to do, Sophocles no less than Shakspere. We can see that Molière took account of what was wanted by the Parisians of the second half of the seventeenth century, by the young King, by the burghers, and by the populace also. He gave them what they expected from him, and also more than they expected, sometimes even more than they were ready to receive. Leading

his audiences upward, coaxing them along, skilfully stimulating their desires, he was able at last to rise to a level to which no earlier comic dramatist had aspired.

Great dramatists have always been popular in their own day. True it is that they may not have been adequately appreciated while they were alive, but they were successful, none the less. I doubt whether even Ben Jonson with all his friendship for Shakspere was really aware of his friend's true greatness; and I fear that of all Molière's associates only Boileau and La Fontaine were keen-eyed enough to measure his superiority. But there is no denying that Shakspere and Molière were popular favorites and that the playgoers flocked gladly to see their plays performed.

This immediate popularity of theirs was due in a measure to their skill in hitting the taste and in satisfying the likings of their contemporaries,—altho of course, their permanent fame could be assured only by their major merits, by their power of creating characters, which are eternally attractive because they are eternally veracious.

Molière did not hesitate to amuse his audiences with satire of passing fads and follies, with things strictly contemporary, with things absolutely up-to-date. Now, it is the disadvantage

of the contemporary that it is four parts temporary; as it is the disadvantage of the up-to-date that it is swiftly out-of-date. It is a striking testimony to Molière's genius that his satire of the whims and oddities of his own period has its lesson for us in another century and in another country. What was fleeting and momentary is only on the surface, and beneath it we can discover a veracity as abiding as human folly is perennial. The fashion has altered and not a little, but the stuff is the same, since it is woven from the unfailing absurdity of human nature.

The affectations that Molière held up to scorn in the 'Précieuses Ridicules' in France are not unlike those which we laugh at today in America,—in the "Culture Club of Keokuk, Ia.," for example, and in other clubs, not so far from Manhattan Island. The Learned Ladies, the 'Femmes Savantes' of Manhattan Island are not now cultivating the garden of Greek roots; they are digging up the roots of society; they are parlor-anarchists; they are Little Groups of Serious Thinkers, who pride themselves on being open-minded, not having discovered the inconvenience of a mind open at both ends. The Imaginary Invalid today is a morbid student of psycho-analysis making a collection of his own Freudulent complexes. And Tartuffe? Well, our Tartuffes do not masquerade as religious

bigots, rather are they moral reformers, "damning the sins they have no mind to," reformers for revenue only, as dangerous to the public welfare today as was Tartuffe in his time. What is Scapin but a proof-before-letters of the chief figure in our crook-plays? What is the unscrupulous valet who befools Monsieur de Pourceaugnac but the first edition of our confidence-operator, our bunco-steerer?—if I may venture to employ these unsavory neologisms in the presence of two members of the French Academy. My sole excuse for this lapse from linguistic propriety is my wish to emphasize the fact that Molière is our contemporary, after all, —that he is quite up-to-date two centuries and a half since he died.

Molière is important to us here in America, not only because of the pleasure and the profit we can find in the performance of his plays and in their perusal if we are denied the benefit of seeing them acted, he is important to us not only because he is the master of modern comedy, but also because he is the chief figure in French literature, because he united in himself certain of the chief characteristics of that literature, its dramatic ingenuity and its abhorrence of affectation, its relish for the concrete and its social instinct. It is good for us to see these characteristics in action; and the lesson Molière

has for us transcends the limitations of literature. While there may be a more soaring imagination, a more easily released energy, in English literature in both its branches, British and American, than there is in French literature, there is a far less persistent application of the reasoning powers, a less free play of the intelligence, less sobriety and less sanity, more exuberance and more extravagance. The French inherited from the classics a sense of form, a desire for unity of tone, for harmony of color, for logic in structure and for lucidity in style. If Carlyle and Ruskin and Whitman had sat at the feet of the masters of French literature, they would have been less impatient of authority, less flagrantly individualistic, less rhetorically riotous. Though they might have lost a little they would have gained much. Nisard knew his countrymen when he asserted that in France "reason, which is the common bond of all men, is more highly esteemed than imagination, which disperses them and isolates them."

We have gathered here today to listen to the addresses of our two guests from across the sea and to pay tribute to a great Frenchman; and we have also a larger purpose—to testify to our appreciation of French literature as a whole and to our admiration and affection for the French people. Here in America we are not

likely ever to forget the indebtedness we are under to France for coming to our rescue in our hour of need nearly a century and a half ago; that debt is a debt of honor and it is not outlawed by time. Nor can we fail to remember that it was a Frenchman, Rousseau, who inspired the superb eloquence of the Declaration of Independence and that it was another Frenchman, Montesquieu, whose political sagacity guided the makers of our Constitution. The tie that binds us to France is twisted of many strands of many colors, but we have reason to believe that it is strong enough to withstand any strain that may be put upon it.

(1922.)

XIV

THEODORE ROOSEVELT AS A MAN OF LETTERS

XIV

THEODORE ROOSEVELT AS A MAN OF LETTERS

I

THE more closely we scrutinize Theodore Roosevelt's life and the more carefully we consider his many ventures in many totally different fields of human activity, the less likely we are to challenge the assertion that his was the most interesting career ever vouchsafed to any American,—more interesting even than Benjamin Franklin's, fuller, richer and more varied. Like Franklin, Roosevelt enjoyed life intensely. He was frank in declaring that he had been happy beyond the common lot of man; and we cannot doubt that Franklin had the same feeling. The most obvious cause of the happiness and of the interest of their contrasting careers, is that they had each of them an incessant and insatiable curiosity, which kept forcing them to push their inquiries into a variety of subjects wholly unrelated one to another. The 'Many-

sided Franklin' was the title which Paul Leicester Ford gave to his biography; and Roosevelt was even more polygonal.

Like Franklin again, Roosevelt will hold a secure place among our statesmen, our men of science and our men of letters, demanding due appraisal by experts in statecraft, in natural history and in literature. But they differ in this, that Roosevelt was an author by profession, and Franklin was an author by accident. Roosevelt had looked forward to literature as a calling, whereas Franklin produced literature only as a by-product. Excepting "Poor Richard's Almanack" Franklin never composed anything in the hope or desire for fame or for money, or even in response to a need for self-expression. He never published a book; and if he could return to earth he would indubitably be surprised to discover that he held an important place in the histories of American literature. Roosevelt was as distinctly a man of letters as he was a man of action. He made himself known to the public, first of all, as the historian of the American navy in the War of 1812; he followed this up with the four strenuously documented volumes of his 'Winning of the West'; and amid all the multiplied activities of his later years he made leisure for the appreciation of one or another of the books he had found to his taste.

II

It must be admitted that in the decade which elapsed after he left the White House his intense interest in public affairs led him to devote a large part of his energy to the consideration of the pressing problems of the hour, to topics of immediate importance, to themes of only an ephemeral value, sufficient unto the day. In three or four different periodicals he served as "contributing editor"; in other words, he was a writer of signed editorials, in which he was always free to express his own views frankly and fully without undue regard for that mysterious entity, the "policy of the paper." These contemporary contributions to dailies and weeklies and monthlies are journalism rather than literature; and the more completely they fulfill the purpose of the moment the less do they demand preservation; now and again they have the over-emphatic repetitions which are more or less justified by the conditions of journalism. But in these same ten years Roosevelt wrote also his two books of travel in Africa and in South America, as vivacious as they are conscientious, his alluring and self-revelatory autobiography, his two volumes of essays and addresses, 'History as Literature' and 'A Book-lover's Holidays in the Open,' both of them pungent with his individuality.

It is not always—in fact it is not often—that the accomplished man of letters has the essential equipment of the journalist; he is likely to be more or less "academic" and to lack the simplicity, the singleness of purpose, the directness of statement demanded in the discussion of the events of the moment. The editorial stands in the same relation to literature that the stump-speech does to the stately oration. The editorial, like the stump-speech, aims at immediate effect; and it is privileged to be more emphatic than might be becoming in a more permanent effort. It was perhaps Roosevelt's wide experience in addressing the public from the platform which made it easier for him to qualify as a contributing editor and to master the method of the newspaper.

In his state-papers and in his messages he had already proved that he had the gift of the winged phrase, keenly pointed and barbed to flesh itself in the memory. He had preached the doctrine of the Strenuous Life and he had expounded the policy of the Square Deal. He had denounced some men as Undesirable Citizens and others as Malefactors of Large Wealth. And when he took up the task of journalism he was happily inspired to the minting of other memorable phrases. There was, for example, an unforgettable felicity in his characterization of the

Weasel Words that sometimes suck the life out of a phrase, seemingly strong and bold. Never did he use smooth and sleek rhetoric to disguise vagueness of thought. In the periodical as on the platform he spoke out of the fulness of his heart, after his mind had clarified his emotion so that it poured forth with crystalline lucidity.

There was no mistaking the full intent of his own words. He knew what he meant to say, and he knew how to say it with simple sincerity and with vigorous vivacity. His straightforwardness prevented his ever employing phrases that faced both ways and that provided rat-holes from which he might crawl out. His style was tinglingly alive; it was masculine and vascular; and it was always the style of a gentleman and a scholar. He could puncture with a rapier and he could smash with a sledge-hammer; and if he used the latter more often than the former it was because of his consuming hatred of things "unmanly, ignominious, infamous."

Journalism was young, indeed, one might say that it was still waiting to be born, when Franklin put forth his pamphlets appealing to the scattered colonies to get together and to make common cause against the French who had let loose the Indians to harry our borders. Franklin was cannily persuasive, making use of no drum-like words, empty, loud-sounding and

monotonous. But there burnt in his pages the same pure fire of patriotism that lighted Roosevelt's more impassioned exhortations for us to arouse ourselves from lethargy, that we might do our full duty in the war which saved civilization from the barbarian. Where Franklin addressed himself to common sense, Roosevelt called upon the imagination. Perhaps Franklin, as is the tendency of a practical man, a little distrusted the imagination; but Roosevelt, as practical as Franklin, had imagination himself, and he knew that the American people also had it.

It is by imagination, by the vision and the faculty divine, that now and again an occasional address, like Lincoln's at Gettysburg, or a contributed editorial, like Roosevelt's on the 'Great Adventure,' transcends its immediate and temporary purpose, and is lifted aloft up to the serener heights of pure literature. It is not without intention that the 'Great Adventure' has been set by the side of the Gettysburg address; they are akin, and there is in Roosevelt's paragraphs not a little of the poetic elevation and of the exalted dignity of phrase which combine to make the address a masterpiece of English prose. Consider the opening words of the 'Great Adventure' and take note of the concision, like that of a Greek inscription:

Only those are fit to live who do not fear to die, and none are fit to die who have shrunk from the joy of life and the duty of life. Both life and death are parts of the same Great Adventure. Never yet was worthy adventure worthily carried through by the man who put his personal safety first. Never yet was a country worth living in unless its sons and daughters were of that stern stuff which bade them die for it at need; and never yet was a country worth dying for unless its sons and daughters thought of life as something not concerned only with the selfish evanescence of the individual, but as a link in the great chain of creation and causation, so that each person is seen in his true relations as an essential part of the whole, whose life must be made to serve the larger and continuing life of the whole.

Consider also these words a little later in the same article:

If the only son who is killed at the front has no brother because his parents coldly dreaded to play their part in the Great Adventure of Life, then our sorrow is not for them, but solely for the son who himself dared the Great Adventure of Death. If, however, he is the only son because the Unseen Powers denied others to the love of his father and mother, then we mourn doubly with them, because their darling went up to the sword of Azrael, because he drank the dark drink proffered by the Death Angel.

III

ROOSEVELT'S style is firm and forthright; and its excellence is due to his having learnt the lesson of the masters of English. He wrote well because he had read widely and deeply,—because he had absorbed good literature for the sheer delight he took in it. Consciously or unconsciously he enriched his vocabulary, accumulating a store of strong words which he made flexible, bending them to do his bidding. But he was never bookish in his diction; he never went in quest of recondite vocables, partly because his taste was refined but chiefly because he was ever seeking to be "understanded of the people." Like Lord Morley, he had little of the verbal curiosity contemned by Milton as "toilsome vanity"; and he was ready with Montaigne to laugh "at fools who will go a quarter of a league to run after a fine word."

To him life was more important than literature, and what he was forever seeking to put into his literature was life itself. He was a nature-lover, but what he loved best was human nature. Yet his relish for life was scarcely keener than his relish for literature. We may think of him as preeminently an outdoors man, and such he was, of course; but he was also an indoors man, a denizen of the library as he was

an explorer of the forest. Indoors and out he was forever reading; and he could not venture into the wilds of Africa in search of big game without taking along with him the volumes of the Pigskin Library, which testified at once to the persistence and to the diversity of his tastes as a reader.

He devoured books voraciously, all sorts of books, old and new, established classics, and evanescent "best sellers," history and fiction, poetry and criticism, travels on land and voyages by sea. To use an apt phrase of Dr. Holmes, he was at home with books "as a stable boy is with horses." He might have echoed Lowell's declaration that he was a bookman. The title of one of his later collections of essays is revelatory of his attitude toward himself,—'A Booklover's Holidays in the Open,' for even when he went into the open he wanted to have a book within reach. Of course, he enjoyed certain books, and certain kinds of books better than others. Of all Shakspere's tragedies he best liked the martial 'Macbeth,' preferring it to the more introspective 'Hamlet.' He was not unlike the lad who was laid up and whose mother proposed to read the Bible to him, whereupon he asked her to pick out "the fightingest parts." He had a special regard for the masculine writers, for Malory, more particu-

larly, holding the 'Morte d'Arthur' to be a better piece of work than the more delicately decorated 'Idylls of the King' which Tennyson made out of it. In fact, Roosevelt once went so far as to dismiss Tennyson's elaborate transpositions as "tales of blameless curates, clad in tin-mail."

He enjoyed writing as much as he did reading, and as a result his works go far to fill a five-foot shelf of their own. When the man of action that he was had been out in search of new experiences and in the hunt for new knowledge, the man of letters that he was also, impelled him to lose no time in setting down the story of his wanderings that others might share in the pleasure of his adventure without undergoing its perils. Being a normal human being he liked to celebrate himself and to be his own Boswell; but he was never vain or conceited in his record of his own sayings and doings. He had the saving sense of humor, delighting in nothing more than to tell a tale against himself. He was not self-conscious nor thin-skinned; and he laughed as heartily as anyone when Mr. Dooley pretended to mistake the title of his account of the work of the Rough Riders, calling it 'Alone in Cubia.' Perhaps it was because he was so abundantly gifted with the sense of humor that he had a shrewd insight

into character and that he could depict it incisively by the aid of a single significant anecdote. In sketching the many strange creatures with whom he was associated in the Far West, in South America and in Africa, he showed that he had the kodak eye of the born reporter.

·So it is that he gave us the two delightful volumes for which he drew upon his experiences as a rancher in the West, the stirring book devoted to the deeds of his dearly beloved Rough Riders ("my regiment"), and the solid tomes in which he set down the story of his trips as a faunal naturalist in Africa and in South America. They are all books pulsing with life, vibrating with vitality, and they are all books unfailingly interesting to the reader because whatever is narrated in them has been unfailingly interesting to the writer. Walter Bagehot once suggested that the reason why there are so few really good books out of all the immense multitude which pour forth from the press, is that the men who have seen things and done things cannot write, whereas the men who can write have not done anything or seen anything. Roosevelt's adventure books are really good, because, after having seen many things and done many things, he could write about them so vividly and so sharply as to make his readers see them.

Perhaps the 'Autobiography' ought to be

classed with the earlier adventure books, since they also were autobiographic. It is a candid book; it puts before us the man himself as reflected in his own mirror; but it is not complete, since it was composed, not in the retrospective serenity of old age, but while the autobiographer was in the thick of the fight, compelled to silence about many of the events of his career which we should like to see elucidated. It was published serially month by month; and, perhaps because of the pressure under which it was undertaken, it seems to have a vague air of improvisation, as tho it had not been as solidly thought out and as cautiously written out as one or another of the earlier books, the 'Hunting Trips of a Ranchman,' for example, or the 'Rough Riders.' But it abides as a human document; and it explains why the autobiographer's buoyant personality appealed so intimately to the American people.

IV

'A Booklover's Holidays in the Open' contains two characteristic essays, both of them delightful in their zest and in their individuality. One is on 'Books for Holidays in the Open' and the other is about the author's 'Wild Hunting Companions,' a searching and sympathetic ap-

preciation of the human types developed by the wild life of the lessening wild places still uninvaded by advancing civilization. In 'History as Literature and Other Essays,' there are other papers as characteristic and as attractive. Three of them are the addresses which he delivered (on his triumphant return from his African journeys) at the Universities of Oxford and Berlin and at the Sorbonne in Paris. They represent the high-water mark of his work as a constructive thinker. They are the lofty and dignified utterances of a statesman who was a practical politician of immense experience in the conduct of public affairs, and who was also a man of letters ambitious to present worthily the results of his experience and of his meditation. These disquisitions on themes seemingly so remote from his special fields of activity as the biological analogies of history, for example, have been called daring; and in fact they are daring. But they justify themselves, since they disclose Roosevelt's possession of the assimilated information and the interpreting imagination which could survey the whole field of history, past and present, using the present to illuminate the past and the past as a beacon to the present, and calling upon natural history to shed light upon the evolution of human history.

These addresses are representative of Roose-

velt when he chose to indulge himself in historic speculation; and in the same volume there is an essay, less ambitious but highly individual in theme and in treatment, and quite as characteristic as its stately companions. This is the discussion at once scholarly and playful of 'Dante in the Bowery'—a paper which could have been written only by a lover of lofty poetry who had been a practical politician in New York. To Roosevelt Dante's mighty vision is not a frigid classic demanding formal lip-service but a living poem with a voice as warm as if it had been born only yesterday. To him the figures who pass along Dante's pages are not graven images, tagged with explanatory foot-notes; they are human beings like unto us, the men of today and of New York.

Thus it is that Roosevelt is led to dwell on the unaffectedness with which Dante dares to be of his own town and of his own time, and the simplicity with which Dante, wishing to assail those guilty of crimes of violence, mentions in one stanza Attila and in the next two local highwaymen "by no means as important as Jesse James and Billy the Kid," less formidable as fighting men and with adventures less startling and less varied. Roosevelt called attention to the fact that "of all the poets of the nineteenth century, Walt Whitman was the only

one who dared to use the Bowery,—that is, use anything that was striking and vividly typical of the humanity around him—as Dante used the ordinary humanity of his day; and even Whitman was not quite natural in doing so, for he always felt that he was defying conventions and prejudices of his neighbors; and his self-consciousness made him a little defiant." Roosevelt asked why it is that to us moderns in the twentieth century it should seem improper, and even ludicrous, to illustrate human nature by examples chosen alike from Castle Garden and the Piræus, "from Tammany and the Roman mob organized by the foes or friends of Cæsar. To Dante such feeling itself would have been inexplicable."

V

VARIED and brilliant as were Roosevelt's contributions to other departments of literature, it is more than probable that his ultimate reputation as a man of letters will most securely rest upon his stern labors as a historian,—not on the brisk and lively little book on New York which he contributed to Freeman's 'Historic Towns' series, not on the biographies of Benton and Gouverneur Morris which he wrote for the 'American Statesmen' series, not on the shrewd and sympathetic life of Cromwell, not on the

stirring and picturesque 'Hero Tales of American History,' which he prepared in collaboration with Henry Cabot Lodge, but on the four stately volumes of his most energetic and ambitious undertaking, the story of the 'Winning of the West,' which he began early in his manhood and which he was always hoping to carry further. Macaulay once praised the work of one of his contemporaries because it exhibited the most valuable qualities of the historian,—"perspicuousness, conciseness, great diligence in examining authorities, great judgment in weighing testimony, and great impartiality in estimating characters"; and no competent reader of the 'Winning of the West' could fail to find all these qualities in its pages. A later historian, Professor Morse Stephens, set up four tests for the valuation of historical writing; first, the modern historian must have "conscientiously mastered all the documents relating to his period at first hand"; secondly, he must appreciate all accessible primary material "with careful weighing of evidence and trained faculty of judgment"; thirdly, he must possess absolute impartiality, "in intention as well as in act"; and fourthly, he must also possess "the one necessary feature of literary style" in a history, "clearness of statement." And the 'Winning of the West' can withstand the application of all four of these

tests. In other words, it is scientific in the collection and comparison and analysis of the accessible facts, and it is artistic in its presentation to the reader of the results of the writer's indefatigable research.

As the 'Winning of the West' was written by Roosevelt it could not help being readable. Every chapter and every page is alive and alert with his own forceful and enthusiastic personality. This readability is not attained by any facile eloquence or any glitter of rhetoric, altho it has passages, and not a few of them, which linger in the memory because of their felicitous phrasing. The book is abidingly readable because it is the result of deliberate literary art employed to present honestly the result of honest, scientific inquiry. This is his sterling virtue as a historian, fittingly acknowledged by his fellow-workers in this field when they elected him to the presidency of the American Historical Association.

In an evaluation of the final volumes of Parkman's fascinating record of the fateful struggle between the French and the English for the control of North America, an article written in 1892 while that great historian was still living, Roosevelt remarked that "modern historians always lay great stress upon visiting the places where the events they described occurred"; and

he commented that, altho this is advisable, it is far less important than the acquisition of an intimate acquaintance "with the people and the life described." Then he asserted that "it is precisely this experience which Mr. Parkman has had, and which renders his work so especially valuable. He knows the Indian character and the character of the white frontiersman, by personal observation as well as by books; neither knowledge by itself being of much value for a historian. In consequence he writes with a clear and keen understanding of the conditions." Roosevelt himself had the clear and keen understanding of the conditions with which he credited Parkman, in whose footsteps he was following, since the 'Winning of the West' may be called a continuation of 'France and England in North America.' Like Parkman, Roosevelt was a severely trained scientific investigator, who was also a born story-teller. If the historian is only an investigator, the result is likely to be a justification of the old jibe which defined history as "an arid region abounding in dates"; and if he is only a story-teller his narrative will speedily disintegrate.

"The true historian," Roosevelt asserted in 'History as Literature,' his presidential address to the American Historical Association, "will bring the past before our eyes as if it were the

present. He will make us see as living men the hard-faced archers of Agincourt, and the war-worn spearmen who followed Alexander down beyond the rim of the known world. We shall hear grate on the coast of Britain the keels of the Low-Dutch sea-thieves whose children's children were to inherit unknown continents. . . . We shall see conquerors riding forward to victories that have changed the course of time. . . . We shall see the terrible horsemen of Timur the Lame ride over the roof of the world; we shall hear the drums beat as the armies of Gustavus and Frederick and Napoleon drive forward to victory. . . . We shall see the glory of triumphant violence and the revel of those who do wrong in high places; and the broken-hearted despair that lies beneath the glory and the revel. We shall also see the supreme righteousness of the wars for freedom and justice, and know that the men who fell in those wars made all mankind their debtors."

VI

At the end of the Foreword to 'A Book-lover's Holidays,' there is a noble passage which calls for quotation here as an example of Roosevelt's command of nervous English, measured and cadenced. It is proposed in proof of the

assertion that the joy of living is his who has the heart to demand it:

> The beauty and charm of the wilderness are his for the asking, for the edges of the wilderness lie close beside the beaten roads of present travel. He can see the red splendor of desert sunsets, and the unearthly glory of the afterglow on the battlements of desolate mountains. In sapphire gulfs of ocean he can visit islets, above which the wings of myriads of sea-fowl make a kind of shifting cuneiform script in the air. He can ride along the brink of the stupendous cliff-walled canyon, where eagles soar below him, and cougars make their lairs on the edges and harry the big-horned sheep. He can journey through the northern forests, the home of the giant moose, the forests of fragrant and murmuring life in summer, the iron-bound and melancholy forests of winter.

Theodore Roosevelt had the heart to demand it, and the joy of living was his.

(1919.)

XV

MEMORIES OF MARK TWAIN

XV

MEMORIES OF MARK TWAIN

I

THERE can be but very few of the countless thousands of Mark Twain's admirers whose admiration was born as early as mine, now more than half-a-century ago, in fact in 1867, when his first book, the 'Jumping Frog and other sketches,' was published and when a copy came into my possession, I being then a bookish lad of only fifteen. For two score years I "read after him," as the phrase is; and so it is that I have been able to profit by what I believe to be an inestimable advantage for the proper appreciation of an author,—that of following his work from first to last, growing up with it, as it ripened and varied and broadened, revealing more and more richly the man whose self-expression it was. It is a far cry from the 'Jumping Frog' to the 'Mysterious Stranger'; and the long road from the bold humor of the one to the bitter satire of the other had many an unexpected turning.

Four years after the 'Jumping Frog' had appeared I was elected to the Lotos Club, altho I was then still an undergraduate at Columbia; and I have a doubtful impression that in the Lotos Club, then newly settled in its first home at Irving Place, next to the Academy of Music, I saw Mark more than once, gazing at him, with the remote respect proper in a youth, who had his own vague literary aspirations, for an author who had already published the widely popular 'Innocents Abroad.' What I can assert with absolute conviction is that I did see him in 1875 at the hundredth performance of the happy-go-lucky dramatization of his half of the 'Gilded Age,' (in which Charles Dudley Warner had been his collaborator). John T. Raymond, a most accomplished comedian, had identified himself with the optimistic character of Colonel Mulberry Sellers. At this performance I not only saw Mark but heard him make a speech when he was called before the curtain. As I remember it, this was not one of his happiest addresses, since it consisted of little more than his recital of the story of the 'Celebrated Mexican Plug,' an unbroken broncho, possessing the power of speedily reducing the man who attempted to ride him to a condition of exhausted speechlessness. "And that," Mark concluded, "is the condition in which I find myself to-

night. I stand before you now quite speechless!"

Then in 1882 Laurence Hutton and Lawrence Barrett, Frank Millet and E. A. Abbey, W. M. Laffan and I organized an intermittent and sporadic dining club, which we called The Kinsmen, because we intended to gather in the practitioners of the kindred arts. It had no officers, no dues, and no rules, except that an invitation to one of our meetings was to be accepted as an election to membership. I gave the first dinner; and at the second, given by Hutton a full year later, I was delighted to find myself sitting by the side of Mark Twain. Then began an intimacy which lasted until his death more than twenty years thereafter. Three or four years later, when 'Huckleberry Finn' was issued, I had the pleasure of reviewing it in the London *Saturday Review*, hailing it as one of the indisputable masterpieces of American fiction. This pleased Mark; and as he had somehow discovered that I had written the criticism. he took occasion to thank me.

Mark was also one of the earliest members of the Authors Club, of which I had been one of the founders; and I served with him on the executive committee of the American Copyright League. It was during our eight-year campaign for international copyright that my rela-

tions with Mark became a little strained,—altho fortunately only for a brief period. Until the passage of our bill in 1891, no foreign author had any control over the publication of his writings in the United States; an American publisher could reprint without payment anything any British man of letters wrote; and as a result every American man of letters had to see his books sold in competition with stolen goods. We all felt this keenly; but only a few of us knew that there were certain London publishers quite as willing to reprint American books without payment as certain New York publishers were to appropriate British books on the same terms. While we wanted the rights of the authors of the United Kingdom to be protected in the United States, we also wanted the rights of the authors of the United States to be protected in the United Kingdom. In 1889 I prepared a paper for the *New Princeton Review*, which I called 'American Authors and British Pirates' and in which I collected examples of the cruel treatment accorded to certain of our writers, forced to behold their works reprinted in England without their permission and often with an offensive mutilation of the original in the vain effort to adjust it to the supposed prejudices of British readers.

The facts I had collected surprized many who

had been ignorant of them; and the editor of the *New Princeton Review*, Professor William M. Sloane, suggested that I might get together material for a second paper. So I wrote to half-a-dozen American authors who had been maltreated by British publishers, requesting them to supply me with particulars. One of my letters went to Mark; and a few days later Professor Sloane let me see Mark's reply, which he had sent not to me but direct to the editor for publication in the *New Princeton*. It was a vehement protest against my suggestion that the British law needed any alteration; and it held me up to scorn for making the needless proposal. Mark let his pen run away with him and poured ridicule upon me, in a fashion which was lacking in consideration for my feelings even if it was not actually wanting in courtesy. It was a brilliant letter, certain to evoke abundant laughter from every reader—excepting only the one to whom it was addressed. It was also an unanswerable letter, in so far as its inimitable manner was concerned; and yet it had to be answered somehow.

What had aroused the sudden wrath which had blazed up in Mark's epistolary excoriation was my assertion that the British law could be improved, it being then perfectly satisfactory to Mark himself. Now the British law was better

than the American in only one particular. No British author could get any protection in the United States, whereas the British courts had held that any book first published in Great Britain while its author was domiciled in any part of the British Empire, was entitled to the full protection accorded by the statutes to a book by a British subject.

In accord with the old rule of controversy—always to answer earnest with jest and jest with earnest—I wrote a short and simple reply, strictly legal in tone. I pointed out that Mark, having permanent relations with a satisfactory publisher in London could always run up to Canada or slip down to Bermuda so as to be under the British flag on the day when any new book of his was to be issued in England. Then I made it plain that this procedure was not possible for a young writer with his first book, often his best and often made up out of contributions to periodicals. There was no fun in my response and it must have seemed pretty pale in comparison with Mark's corruscating fireworks; but I had on my side both the facts and the law.

I had cause to feel aggrieved that he had seen fit to pillory me in the market-place; but I was unwilling to take offence; and I was unable to see any reason for his resentment of my studi-

ously respectful retort. Yet I soon heard from more than one of our common friends that Mark was acutely dissatisfied; and when I next met him, he was distant in his manner,—and I might even describe it as chilly. Of course, I regretted this; but I could only hope that his fundamental friendliness would warm him up sooner or later. I knew that Mark had a hair-trigger temper and that he was swift to let loose all the artillery of heaven to blow a foe from off the face of the earth. I was aware moreover that a professional humorist is not infrequently a little deficient in that element of the sense-of-humor which guards a man against taking himself too seriously. I had been told also that Mark genial as he was, and long suffering as he often was, could be a good hater, superbly exaggerating the exuberance of his ill-will. His old friend, Twitchell, once wrote him about a piece of bad luck which had befallen a man who had been one of Mark's special antipathies; and Mark wrote back:

I am more than charmed to hear of it; still, it doesn't do me half the good it would have done if it had come sooner. My malignity has so worn out and wasted away with time and the exercise of charity that even his death would not afford me anything more than a mere fleeting ecstasy, a sort of momentary, pleasurable titillation, now—unless of course, it happened in some

particularly radiant way, like burning or boiling or something like that. Joys that come to us after the capacity for enjoyment is dead are but an affront.

II

I DID not have to wait very long before our friendship was renewed, never again to be disturbed. We spent part of the summer of 1890 in the Catskills, at Onteora, the hill-top park dotted with unpretending cottages which housed a colony of workers in the several arts,—Mrs. Candace Wheeler, Mrs. Dora Wheeler Keith, Mrs. Schuyler Van Renssellaer, Mrs. Mary Mapes Dodge, Mrs. Custer, Mrs. Runkle and her daughter Bertha, Carroll Beckwith, Laurence Hutton, Heber Newton and Mark Twain. Within a week after our arrival Mark stepped up on our porch, as pleasantly as if there had never been a cloud on our friendship. "I hear you play a French game called piquet," he began. "I wish you would teach me." And we taught him, altho it was no easy task, since he was forever wanting to make over the rules of the game to suit his whim of the moment,—a boyish trait which I soon discovered to be entirely characteristic.

But we were all boys together that summer; and we invented new ways for discharging our

high spirits. On the Fourth of July we had a succession of sports, including a race around the club-house. Mark officiated as timekeeper, supplying a host of fanciful explanations why the runners took twice the time really necessary for the circuit of the building. He had to admit that the joke was on him when at last they did appear—coming back on the side from which they originally started. From the first he felt himself at ease with the friendly folk of Onteora; and I think he was appreciative of the high regard we had for him. He was a hard worker at intervals; and he was then worried by the difficulties in which his business as a publisher was becoming more and more deeply involved. But he liked to play, especially with his own children, making them accept him as of their own age; and he also could play with the grown-ups as if he were a child.

One evening we all gathered at Mrs. Wheeler's log-cabin and sat around a crackling wood-fire, which was the only light in the large room. We swapped ghost-stories; and at the end Mark told us, as only he could tell it, with a marvellous mastery of pause and intonation, the harrowing tale of the 'Golden Arm.' The curious reader will find full directions for the proper delivery of this blood curdling narrative in the paper he called 'How to tell a Story';—but the

reader who tries to follow the precepts there set down will need to toil long before he can even approach the perfection of Mark's technic in telling the tale.

He sat to Mrs. Wheeler's daughter, Mrs. Keith, for a portrait which adorns to this day the walls of the Bear and Fox Inn, companioned by portraits of several of the other men of letters whose stay made that summer ever memorable in the annals of Onteora. He also sat to Carroll Beckwith, a native of the straggling town in which Mark had spent his boyhood, for a portrait which is, I think, the best that artist ever painted. It represents Mark with a corn-cob pipe in his mouth. Generally he smoked cigars of a specially atrocious brand, but he kept returning fondly to the corn-cob of his youth. At The Players, which he joined about that time, he protested, with all the vehemence of his resplendent vocabulary, against the rule forbidding pipes except in the billiard-room, while cigarettes (which he abominated and objurgated vigorously) were permitted even in the dining room. He was an incessant smoker, yet he was wont to say that he never smoked to excess,—that is, he never smoked two cigars at once and he never smoked when he was asleep. But Howells has recorded that when Mark came to visit him, he used to go into Mark's room at

night to remove the still lighted cigar from the lips of his sleeping guest.

As Onteora had seemed a perilous experiment to its originators the Bear and Fox Inn had been run up as inexpensively as might be; and the partitions separating the upper bed-rooms were only of burlap. Mark had spent a night at the unpretending club-house, when he had earlier come up to make sure that the cottage he had rented would be comfortable for Mrs. Clemens; and as a result of this brief sojourn he was moved to declare that the walls of those bed-rooms were so thin that he "could hear the young lady in the next room change her mind."

That he came up in advance of the family was typical of the care he was never tired of taking to assure his wife's well being. His devotion to her was a matter of daily observation to all of us. He waited on her, protected her, thought for her, as tho nothing else mattered; and to him, it did not. He treated her as a creature of a finer clay, fragile and infinitely precious, needing to be guarded from careless contacts. If ever in this world of mismating a perfect marriage existed, then it was Mark's. As Howells—who knew them both better than any one else—has told us, Mark's love for his wife "was a greater part of him than the love of most men for their wives; and she merited all

the worship he could give her, all the devotion, all the implicit obedience by her surpassing force and beauty of character."

Once and once only did Mark mention his wife in print. This was in a letter on the bringing up of children, which he had sent without her knowledge to the *Christian Union* (now the *Outlook*), in 1885, five years before our summer together at Onteora:

> The mother of my children adores them—there is no milder term for it; and they worship her; they even worship anything which the touch of her hand has made sacred. They know her for the best and truest friend they ever had, or ever shall have; they know her for one who never did them a wrong and cannot do them a wrong; who never told them a lie nor the shadow of one; who never deceived them even by an ambiguous gesture; who never gave them an unreasonable command, nor ever contented herself with anything short of a perfect obedience; who had always treated them as politely and as considerately as she would the best and oldest in the land, and who always required of them gentle speech and courteous conduct toward all, of whatsoever degree, with whom they chanced to come in contact; they know her for one whose promise whether of reward or punishment, is gold, and always worth its face, to the uttermost farthing. In a word, they know her, and I know her, for the best and dearest mother that lives—and by a long, long way the wisest.

III

It was in the course of one of our many conversations at Onteora that Mark described to me his method of work in writing 'Tom Sawyer' and 'Huckleberry Finn.' He declared that there was no episode in either of these stories which had not actually happened, either to himself or to one or another of the boys he had known. He began the composition of 'Tom Sawyer' with certain of his boyish recollections in mind, writing on and on until he had utilized them all, whereupon he put his manuscript aside and ceased to think about it, except in so far as he might recall from time to time, and more or less unconsciously, other recollections of those early days. Sooner or later he would return to his work to make use of memories he had recaptured in the interval. After he had harvested this second crop, he again put his work away, certain that in time he would be able to call back other scenes and other situations. When at last he became convinced that he had made his profit out of every possible reminiscence, he went over what he had written with great care, adjusting the several instalments one to the other, sometimes transposing a chapter or two and sometimes writing into the earlier chapters the necessary preparation for adventures in the later

chapters unforeseen when he was engaged on the beginnings of the book. Thus he was enabled to bestow on the completed story a more obvious coherence than his haphazard procedure would otherwise have attained.

A few years later, when Mark published 'Those Extraordinary Twins,' whose adventures had been originally combined with those of Pudd'nhead Wilson, and had been ejected therefrom because they retarded the main current of his narration, he confessed the disadvantage of his method:

> A man who is not born with the novel-writing gift has a troublesome time of it when he tries to build a novel. I know this from experience. He has no clear idea of his story; in fact, he has no story. He merely has some people in his mind, and an incident or two, also a locality. He knows these people, he knows the selected locality, and he trusts that he can plunge those people into those incidents with interesting results. So he goes to work. To write a novel? No—that is a thought which comes later; in the beginning he is only proposing to tell a little tale; a very little tale; a six-page tale. But as it is a tale he is not acquainted with, and can only find out what it is by listening as it goes along telling itself, it is more than apt to go on and on and on till it spreads itself into a book. I know about this, because it has happened to me so many times.

When he first told me this, I ventured to remind him that this composition at irregular in-

tervals had been the method of Le Sage, whose 'Gil Blas,' the most popular of picaresque romances, was a prototype of 'Huckleberry Finn,' in so far as it presented an unheroic hero who is not the chief actor in the chief episodes he sets forth and who is often little more than a recording spectator, before whose tolerant eyes the panorama of human vicissitude is unrolled. And I was not at all surprised when Mark promptly assured me that he had never read 'Gil Blas'; I knew he was not a bookish man. He was intensely interested in all the manifestation of life, but he had no special fondness for fiction,—an attitude not uncommon among men of letters. He was a constant reader of history and autobiography, not caring overmuch for novels and getting far more enjoyment out of Suetonius or Carlyle than he did out of Scott or Thackeray. Of course, he did not need to be familiar with 'Gil Blas' itself to borrow the pattern which Le Sage had taken over from the Spaniards, as this was ready for his use in the writings of Smollett and Dickens and Marryat.

I took occasion to tell Mark that at my only meeting with Stevenson, a large part of our two hours' talk had been given to 'Huckleberry Finn'; and that I had been delighted to find Stevenson holding as high an opinion of this masterpiece of veracity as I did. I recalled his

assertion that 'Huckleberry Finn' was a better piece of work than 'Tom Sawyer,' not only because it was richer in matter more artistically presented, but also and especially because it had more of the morality which must ever be the support of the noblest fiction. And I also told Mark how H. C. Bunner had confessed to me that he had never fully understood the Southern attitude toward slavery as a peculiar institution, not to be apologized for but rather to be venerated as virtuously righteous, until he read the record of Huck's long struggle with himself to refrain from sending Jim back into the servitude from which he was escaping. If the peculiar institution could so cramp the kindly conscience of Huck Finn, vagabond and son of the town drunkard, then it was an institution indeed, and it was peculiar.

When I thought over Mark's statement that everything in 'Tom Sawyer' and 'Huckleberry Finn' was taken straight from life, I recalled a remark made to me a score of years earlier by the man who had sold Mark his share in the Buffalo *Express*—to the effect that "Mark Twain had a very good memory; and that's where he gets most of his best stories." When I had heard this, I wanted to resent it as a sneer against Mark's originality. But now I know better. It may have been meant as a mean in-

sinuation; but nevertheless it was not far from the truth. Mark was always at his best when he had a solid fact to deal with, an actual episode of his own boyhood or the experience of a friend of his youth. As he told Kipling, "First get your facts,—then you can distort them." Mark took the solid fact which may have come to him from another; he made it his own; and he interpreted it with his vivifying imagination.

In the ample and admirable biography by Albert Bigelow Paine we are told the names of the friends who gave him the raw material out of which Mark made the 'Jumping Frog' and the tale of the 'Blue Jay' in the 'Tramp Abroad.' When Professor William Lyon Phelps wrote to inform Mark that the explanation of Elijah's miracle in calling down fire from Heaven to ignite the water-soaked logs on the altar, put in the mouth of Captain Hurricane Jones in the 'Rambling Notes of an Idle Excursion,' had been anticipated by Sir Thomas Browne in his 'Religio Medici,' Mark promptly replied that he had got the story from an actual sea-captain, Ned Wakeman. And in 'Life on the Mississippi' we can read the bare account of a Southwestern feud which was to suggest the wonderful Shepherdson-Grangerford affair in 'Huckleberry Finn.'

Here is the explanation of the curious in-

equality we observe in Mark's work, and of the disconcerting unreality we find in 'Tom Sawyer Abroad' and in 'Tom Sawyer, Detective.' Where he lacked the support of the solid fact and had to rely on his own fantastic invention his whimsicality was likely to betray him disastrously. It was said long ago that "great poets seldom invent their myths"; and Mark, who was a poet in his way, was able to achieve the most satisfactory result only when he followed in the footsteps of the great poets. Mr. Paine has told us how Mark took down 'A True Story' from the lips of its heroine; and he declares that this provided the imaginative realist with "a chance to exercise two of his chief gifts —transcription and portrayal; he was always greater at these things than at invention." He needed to have the sustaining solidity of the concrete fact, which he could deal with at will, bringing out its humor, its latent beauty and its human significance.

IV

I HAVE already mentioned the startling effectiveness of Mark's own delivery of the story of the 'Golden Arm.' As he was a consummate craftsman in his use of words when he wrote, so he was surpassingly dextrous in his manage-

ment of his voice when he told an anecdote or when he made a speech. The voice itself was a noble organ, strong and flexible, deep and rich; and he had the power of modulating it so as to suggest the most delicate shades of meaning. There was art—and a most carefully studied art—in his seemingly spontaneous utterances. He drawled along and appeared to hesitate for the word he needed and then to find it with unconcealed satisfaction; and thus he made his hearers feel that he was merely talking to them in a totally unpremeditated way,—and all the while what he had to say had been thought out and put into words, and perhaps even rehearsed to himself that he might be sure of his rhythm, his emphasis, and his pauses. His method was his own; and he was its master. It was indisputably individual; but I have heard more than one professional elocutionist express delighted admiration for it, devoid as it was of all their paraded devices.

It was because he was an artist with all an artist's desire for perfection, that he prepared himself when he knew he was going to be called upon. But he did not really require this preparation; and if he was taken unawares he could speak on the spur of the moment, making his swift profit out of the remarks of others. When Sir Sidney Lee came to New York, Andrew

Carnegie gave him a dinner to which a score of American men of letters were invited—and half-a-dozen of us were summoned to stand and deliver. When Mark's turn came, he soared aloft in whimsical exaggeration, casually dropping a reference to the time when he had lent Carnegie a million dollars. Our smiling host promptly interjected: "That had slipt my memory!" And Mark looked down on him solemnly, and retorted, "Then, the next time, I'll take a receipt."

At a luncheon to Theodore Roosevelt not long after the Spanish War, the Colonel of the Rough Riders turned to Mark, in the course of a military reminiscence, and said, "As a veteran of the Confederate Army, Mr. Clemens, you will perhaps recall the condition of nervous excitement a man is likely to be in when he first goes under fire?" And Mark instantly responded, "I know, Governor, I do indeed! And I have the personal peculiarity that I can preserve that condition all through the engagement!"

His humor could be swift and direct. He was not one of those wits who have to be cautious in taking aim; he could fire at the word and the bullet sped straight to the bull's eye. Yet he scored a miss now and then; perhaps because he failed to see the target in consequence of some sudden obscuring of his vision. He was

acutely conscious of the lamentable fiasco he made in Boston when he brought in the names of Emerson, Longfellow and Holmes, all three of whom were benignantly listening to him. I have earlier implied that his little speech before the curtain on the hundredth night of the 'Gilded Age' was more or less of a disappointment to all who heard it. And at another theatrical gathering, at a supper given by Augustin Daly and A. M. Palmer to Henry Irving, Mark failed to improve the occasion; he did not say a word about the distinguished guest; he actually took for his topic the long clam of New England—and what was worse, this inappropriate offering was read from manuscript! I cannot say now how humorous this essay may have been in itself; I can only recall that it did not seem at all funny to any of those who had joyfully and hopefully applauded when Mark first rose to his feet.

In all three of these cases his discomfiture was due to his failure to hit the temper of his audience. He did not make contact with those whose attention he wanted to arouse and whose interest he was striving to retain. This is a condition to which every speaker is subject; and it was a condition out of which Mark was generally able to make his profit. I have heard him deliver a score of after-dinner speeches; and

only once or twice was his intuition at fault. Nothing could have been better—that is to say, more characteristic—in its matter or in its method than what he said at the dinner given to him on his seventieth birthday. It had his customary exaggeration, of course, and not a little of his humorous distortion of fact. It was all about himself, which was entirely satisfactory to us, for he could not but be the topic of every speech. It was genial and friendly; and at the end it attained a graceful dignity which sat well upon him as he stood there facing us, with his "good gray head that all men knew." He closed by telling us there was one satisfaction in attaining the scriptural limit of years;—there is no longer any necessity for pleading a previous engagement when we prefer to stay at home. We need only reply, "Your invitation honors me and pleases me because you still keep me in your remembrance, but I am seventy, seventy, and would nestle in the chimney corner, and smoke my pipe, and read my book, and take my rest, wishing you well in all affection, and that when you in your turn shall arrive at pier No. 70, you may step aboard your waiting ship with a reconciled spirit, and lay your course toward the setting sun with a contented heart."

Equally felicitous—although in a totally different vein—was a speech which he once made

in 1889 or 1890, at the Fellowcraft Club, an organization of magazine writers and illustrators. On this occasion the club had invited the best known after-dinner speakers of New York, Joseph H. Choate, and Chauncey M. Depew, Horace Porter and Henry Howland. Unfortunately for them the president of the Fellowcraft, Richard Watson Gilder, called up Mark first of all;—and Mark's speech made it very difficult for those who had to speak after him to employ their customary formulas. So far as I know, Mark never wrote it out; and it was not reported. I have tried to recapture it from my memory; but I am without hope of being able to do more than to indicate its outline, well aware of my inability to recover his exact words.

"I did not know I was going to be called upon this evening and you find me wholly unprepared. No—that's the truth. But it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all, for I've been going to dinners and listening, and I think I've mastered the theory of the after-dinner speech. So now I'm ready at any time to make a speech on any subject. I don't care what it is. Pick out one that will suit you and it will suit me."

"Do you really mean that, Mr. Clemens?" asked Gilder. "Are you willing to let me choose a topic for you?"

"That's just what I do mean," Mark answered.

Gilder had John La Farge on his right and Augustus Saint-Gaudens on his left. He whispered to them and then he raised his voice and said, "Very well then, Mr. Clemens, we'd like to hear you discuss the art of portrait-painting."

And when the laughter had died down, Mark began with solemn seriousness. "Portrait-painting? That's a good subject for a speech, a very good subject indeed. Portrait-painting is an ancient and honorable art, and there are many interesting things to say about it. Yes, it's an ancient and honorable art, altho I don't really know how ancient it is. I never heard that Adam ever sat for his portrait but maybe he did. Maybe he did, I don't know. And that reminds me that when I was a boy I knew a man named Adam,—Adam Brown was his name." And then he told a humorous story about this Adam Brown,—an anecdote wholly unconnected with the art of portrait-painting.

He told it as only he could tell a story; and then he went on in his meditating drawl: "Maybe there never was a portrait of Adam. Even if painting is an ancient and honorable art, it may not be as ancient as that. And I don't think I ever saw a portrait of any of those old Hebrews, or of the Greeks either. But the

Romans did have portraits, carved mostly, not painted. I've never seen a painted portrait of Julius Cæsar, but I can recall more than one statue. And speaking of Cæsar reminds me of a man I knew on the Mississippi who had a dog called Cæsar,"—whereupon he told another story, equally unrelated to the art of portrait-painting.

"But when we come down a little later, we do find portraits in Rome, portraits of the old Popes," he went on; "and in Germany we find portraits of their opponents, Calvin and Luther. There's a portrait of Luther in one of the galleries that lingers in my mind as one of the most masterly revelations of character that I ever saw. And speaking of Luther, there was a man in Hartford who had a cat called Luther,"—and he proceeded to tell a third story, quite innocent of any association with his assigned theme.

"And that's all I know about portrait-painting," he concluded. "At least, it's all I have time to tell you this evening. It is an ancient and honorable art; and I'm very glad indeed that you have given me this opportunity of talking to you about it."

And when Mark sat down, the guests of the club felt sorry for the succeeding speaker, for they knew that the last state of that man was worse than the first.

I do not know whether my indurated modesty ought to permit me to record here another speech of Mark's, which I had personal reasons for including among his best. But it is one of the most vivid of my memories of him; and perhaps I have no right to leave it out of those recollections. In the fall of 1893 two score of my friends paid me the compliment of inviting me to a dinner in testimony of their friendship. Charles Dudley Warner presided, and I had the uncomfortable delight of listening to kindly words from him and Howells, from Gilder and Stedman, from Nicholas Murray Butler and H. C. Bunner. Mark was almost the last of the speakers, and he began by saying that "You have praised this man for a great many things—but you haven't praised him for the most remarkable thing that he has done."

That evoked the expected laughter, since it had occurred to me at any rate that all the possibilities of praise had already been exhausted.

"No," said Mark. "You haven't praised him for the most remarkable thing he has done. He has redeemed the awful and appalling name of B-r-a-n-d-e-r,"—and he drawled forth my name in the lowest notes of his wonderful voice. "B-r-a-n-d-e-r,—it sounds like the mutterings of imprisoned fiends in Hell! B-r-a-n-d-e-r,—why, it was months after I knew him before I dared to breathe that name on the Sabbath day!"

Again and once again and yet again he repeated the dread name, expounding its dreadfulness with all the multiple resources of his inexhaustible vocabulary, and with every repetition of the horrific syllables his tones became more cavernous.

"That's what he has done. He has redeemed the awful and appalling name of Brander, which was good only to curse with—and he has made it a name to conjure with!"

V

After he had followed the equator around the world, earning the money to get himself out of debt, Mark developed an abiding dislike for the dreariness of a lecture tour, with its obligation to arrive at an appointed time at an appointed place, and to entertain a thousand listeners whether he felt in vein or not. None the less did he keenly enjoy talking on his feet when he was not constrained to it. We all like to do that which we know we can do well; and Mark could not help knowing that he was an accomplished speaker, to whom audiences always listened with the expectation of pleasure. In the course of forty years he delivered many after-dinner speeches in America and in Europe, and he made addresses, more or less informal, at many meetings in behalf of good causes.

When I urged him to gather the most durable of these into a book, he wrote back, "I reckon it is a good idea to collect the speeches." When time passed and the promised book did not appear, I repeated the suggestion; and this time he answered, "There isn't going to be any volume of speeches, because I am too lazy to collect them and revise them." But after his death, a volume of speeches was added to his complete works, a volume which was not as cautiously edited as it might have been. The selection was uncertain; the arrangement was casual; and the reporting was often hopelessly unsatisfactory. Not a few of his least worthy efforts were included; and there were also not a few unfortunate repetitions. The volume does contain, however, some of the most amusing and most brilliant of his speeches, printed either from the manuscript which he sometimes wrote out in advance, or from accurate short-hand reports.

It preserves for us the ill-received speech in Boston, that on his seventieth birthday, that on the horrors of the German language and that on the weather of New England. But no matter how skilfully the selection might have been made, the reader could not get from the pale pages of a book the color and the glow that Mark bestowed upon his sentences by the skill

of his own delivery and by the compelling power of his personality. Behind and beneath the words which have been preserved there was the presence of the man himself. Howells has told us that Mark "held that the actor doubled the value of the author's words." And those who had the pleasure and the privilege of listening to anyone of these speeches will recognize that Howells did not overstate the case, when he declared that Mark "was a great actor as well as a great author. He was a most consummate actor, with this difference from other actors, that he was the first to know the thoughts and invent the fancies to which his voice and action gave the color of life. Representation is the art of other actors; his art was creative as well as representative."

If this volume of his speeches had properly been arranged in the order of time, I am inclined to think that it would have revealed a change in his tone as he grew older. Even in some of the earlier addresses, amid all the exuberance of his humorous exaggeration, there were to be noted, now and then, passages of exquisite word-painting—like the truly poetic description of the ice-storm in the speech on the weather of New England. Possibly these passages surprised most of those who heard them and who looked upon Mark as merely a fun-

maker, not suspecting the depth of his nature, his firmly controlled sentiment, his sustaining seriousness,—and not recalling that the richest humor, that of Cervantes and Molière, is rooted in the profoundest melancholy.

Possibly again it was Mark's consciousness that this was the way he was regarded by the unthinking majority which led him to say, more than once in the later years of his life, that he had made a mistake in coming before the world at first as a humorist, as a man trying to make people laugh. In the beginning he may have been content with this reputation; but toward the end he was not. I remember going into The Players at the lunch-hour, half-a-dozen years before he died, and finding him at table. (Howells thinks that Mark did not greatly care for clubs and this may be so, but I can testify that he was completely at home in the house in Gramercy Park and that he relished its friendly informality.) He looked up as I came in and said, "Brander, I was just thinking of you. I'm glad that you and Howells have been telling people that I am serious. When I make a speech now, I find that they are a little disappointed if I don't say some things that are serious; and that just suits me,—for I have so many serious things I want to say!"

Many of those who have written about him

have dealt with him solely as a humorist, overlooking the important fact that a large part of his work is not laughter-provoking and not intended to be. There is the reverent 'Joan of Arc' for one book, and there is the pathetic 'Prince and the Pauper' for another. There is not much fun in the account of the appalling Shepherdson-Grangerford feud in 'Huckleberry Finn'; there is imagination and insight and vision, but only a little incidental humor, all the more effective for being only incidental. As Mark himself put it in one of the maxims of Pudd'nhead Wilson's new calendar which served as chapter-headings in 'Following the Equator': "Everything human is pathetic. The secret source of humor itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humor in heaven."

Many of those who had followed Mark faithfully were surprised and even grieved by the saturnine misanthropy, as it seemed to them, which they found in the two books published after his death, the 'Mysterious Stranger' and 'What is Man?' This could be the case only because they had forgotten or failed to understand that bitter parable, the 'Man who corrupted Hadleyburg,' which has a biting satire not unlike Swift's or Voltaire's. And they had also paid no heed to another maxim in 'Following the Equator'—"Pity is for the living, envy

is for the dead." This last of his books of travel was published in 1897; yet this maxim is only a reiteration of others set at the heads of chapters in 'Pudd'nhead Wilson' issued four years earlier.

When I consider these maxims, I sometimes wonder whether we have not here caught Mark Twain in the act of lowering his comic mask for a moment to let us have a glimpse of the actual Samuel L. Clemens when he had come to be a little weary of wearing it as a disguise. Mark Twain was a humorist beyond all question and one of the mightiest of humorists; but Samuel L. Clemens was immitigably serious and inexorably disenchanted. After he had lost a daughter and then his adored wife and finally another daughter, his outlook on life darkened to barren blackness; and as he had surrendered all hope of seeing them again in another world, the scheme of the universe seemed to him undeniably and inexplicably futile.

Howells has recorded his own impression derived from the unbroken intimacy of two score years, that Mark was a man possessing many and varied personalities. How many these personalities were I do not know; but two of them were present to my eyes after I came to know him well. One of them, of course, was Mark Twain, plain before the gaze of all the

world; and the other was S. L. Clemens with hidden recesses of character unsuspected even by himself. Among his intimates, he was simple, unaffected and friendly. With casual strangers, he seemed sometimes to feel an obligation to play the part of the professional humorist and, so to speak, to act up to the character,—not descending to untoward jocularity, of course, yet none the less yielding a little to the pressure of expectancy.

He used to sign his letters "Mark"; and he let his friends call him "Mark";—I doubt if any of those who were admitted to comradeship with him in his later years would ever have dreamed of addressing him as "Clemens" and still less as "Sam." His dignity was indisputable, despite all his frolicsome friendliness. He was kind enough to tell me that he liked the biographical introduction he had asked me to prepare for the uniform edition of his works issued in 1899; and I suppose that he approved of it largely because I tried to divert attention from his drollery, delightful as that could be, to his veracity as a story-teller, and to his ethical integrity—in other words to the more serious and solid aspects of his work.

VI

However sad he might be because of the bludgeoning of fate, he did not wear his heart upon his sleeve. He knew his life had to be lived out, whatever its inner emptiness; and he took what comfort he could in its more agreeable accidents,—especially in the world-wide recognition of his position as an authentic American, a chief of our literature, as peculiar a product of our Western civilization as Franklin or Lincoln. He was too shrewd to overvalue contemporary admiration, but he relished it for what it was worth. I find among my notes from him one thanking me for sending something I had written about him and saying, "Compliments are sometimes pretty hard to bear, but these are not of that sort; they are conspicuously and most pleasantly the other way."

Although this note came to me in an envelope, it was written on a Viennese correspondence card decorated with his portrait drawn by a local artist. The card itself was an outward and visible sign of the impression he had made in the Austrian capital. His fame had travelled beyond the confines of our language, from the United States to Great Britain and then across the English Channel to the Continent, spreading more rapidly among the Germans than among

the French, naturally enough. At the end of the nineteenth century he was one of the half-dozen men of letters who had international standing.

It was while he was interned at an unknown Austrian health-resort that a little group of us at The Players were talking about him and wondering where he was and where we could send him an expression of our hope that he would soon return to us. I ventured the assertion that he was then so well known that a letter would find him if addressed simply to "Mark Twain. God knows where." Francis Wilson at once put that direction on an envelope and asked me to send Mark our greetings. I don't now recall just what I wrote, but in less than three weeks, I received the reply, "Well, He did!" The post office here had delivered the letter to his New York publishers, who had transmitted it to his London publishers; and they had sent it to his Vienna bankers, so that it came into his hands almost as swiftly as if we had been supplied with the name of the hotel where he had hidden himself.

A humorist is often without honor in his own country,—or at least his own countrymen are too completely in the habit of laughing at his writings to spare time to spy out its less obvious and deeper merits. In England, Stevenson and

Henley, Rudyard Kipling and Andrew Lang were not laggard in their discriminating praise. It was an Englishman, met in a train somewhere in Europe, who recognized him and who startled him by saying abruptly, "Mr. Clemens, I would give ten pounds not to have read your 'Huckleberry Finn'!" And when Mark looked up at him, awaiting an explanation of this extraordinary remark, the Englishman smiled and added: "So that I could again have the great pleasure of reading it for the first time."

As an illustration of the interstices in the British acquaintance with names which are household words with us, Joseph H. Choate used to tell of an experience of his when he was our Ambassador to Great Britain. He was dining with the dons of an Oxford college and he happened to speak of Daniel Webster. He had no sooner uttered the name, than he perceived that it meant nothing to these English scholars. Suddenly one of the younger men, at the far end of the table, spoke up eagerly. "Oh, I know him, Mr. Choate. Wasn't Daniel Webster the name of the jumping frog in Mark Twain's story?"

That was an anecdote which Mark himself enjoyed, as he enjoyed the dinner given him by the staff of *Punch* in the famous dining-room, when he crossed over to England to be the re-

cipient of an honorary degree from Oxford. "Foreign nations," said a clever young American many years ago, "are a kind of contemporaneous posterity"; and when the oldest of English universities stamped Mark with its august approval, he may well have received this as a prediction of the verdict of ensuing generations. Other men of distinction, among them Rudyard Kipling, received degrees on the same day; but Mark was the outstanding figure in the ceremony. He was the one whom the undergraduates most rapturously hailed. And I have no doubt that these manifestations warmed Mark's heart and that he revelled in being thus conspicuously set apart from the others.

I doubt this the less because it was exactly what he had done a few years earlier when he received an honorary degree at the Yale Bicentenary. On that occasion eight American authors had conferred upon them the right to put Litt.D. after their respective names. We had to walk in procession, two by two, to the theater where the degrees were to be bestowed. Mark and Howells led off by right of seniority; next came Thomas Bailey Aldrich and George W. Cable; Gilder and I followed them; and Woodrow Wilson and Thomas Nelson Page as the youngest pair marched behind us. We were four couples, but to the crowds that lined the

streets seven of us vanished and became invisible as soon as the spectators caught sight of Mark. They applauded, they laughed, they shouted his name, they cheered; and Mark took it all to himself very much as if he were a King entering his capital for the first time, and bowing graciously now to the right and then to the left. Howells and Cable, Gilder and I, all old friends of his, enjoyed his enjoyment and accepted our own obscuration as the most natural thing in the world. But I have wondered whether the others, not so fond of Mark as we were, were as readily reconciled to their elimination from the consciousness of the throngs that lined the streets of New Haven.

VII

One reason why 'Tom Sawyer' and 'Huckleberry Finn' are to be ranked among the best of boys' books is because Mark had the rare gift of recovering the spirit of boyhood, with its eagerness and its assurance, its exuberant energy and its incessant desire to assert individuality,—in other words, to "show off." Until his dying day Mark retained the essentials of boyishness. It might almost be said that he never grew up. He had the effervescent irresponsibility of a boy, the impulsive recklessness, which accounted

for his risking his money in a rash succession of inventions. It is not to be wondered at that the name given him by the one who knew him best, his wife, was "Youth."

Perhaps 'Tom Sawyer' is only a little more autobiographic than 'David Copperfield' and 'Pendennis.' As Mark himself told me, more things happened to the hero than ever happened to the author. But there is passage after passage in the juvenile narrative where we can feel assured that Mark was drawing on his own store of memories; and there is one in particular, which discloses a characteristic of Tom's that was also a characteristic of Mark's,—as it possibly is a characteristic of the normal boy. This is the analysis of Tom's emotions when he went to church, the day after he had let the contract for whitewashing the fence. In accord with his usual custom Tom counted the pages of the sermon as the minister turned them, one by one. Then his attention was arrested, for a little while, by what the preacher was saying:

> The minister made a grand and moving picture of the assembling together of the world's hosts at the millennium, when the lion and the lamb should lie down together and a little child should lead them. But the pathos, the lesson, the moral of the great spectacle were lost upon the boy; he thought only of the conspicuousness of the principal character before the on-

looking nations; his face lit with the thought, and he said to himself that he wished he could be that child, if it was a tame lion.

When Mark penned that last sentence he had looked into his own heart. He appreciated the honor Oxford had done him in making him a doctor of letters, but he got a more pervasive satisfaction out of the flaming scarlet gown which was the badge of this distinction. He wore it as often as he could, and he said he would like to wear it always. No doubt, he delighted in the richness of its glowing color, but he delighted even more in the showiness of it. For a similar reason he invented the white suit which he donned late in life and which accentuated the conspicuousness of his shock of white hair, bristling untamed above his penetrating eyes. When he robed himself thus in burning red or in snowy white, he was a boy again, he was Tom Sawyer, projecting himself into the very center of the millennium. And when Mark was thus clothed he did not care whether it was a tame lion or not, for he was well aware that he was a lion himself and that all men knew it.

Mark had been one of the seven men, leaders of the several arts, who were chosen by a ballot of the National Institute of Arts and Letters to be the founders of the American Academy of Arts and Letters; and after his death

the two societies held a memorial meeting, over which Howells presided and at which commemorative addresses were made by Choate, Twitchell, Cable and three or four other men drawn from all quarters of the United States. In his opening remarks as President of the Academy, Howells ventured to suggest what Mark himself would probably have said if his opinion could have been asked as to the nature of the exercises that evening. And so delicate was Howells's understanding of his friend's mind and mood, that we could almost hear Mark himself uttering the words with which he was credited:

Why, of course, you mustn't make a solemnity of it; you mustn't have it that sort of obsequy. I should want you to be serious about me—that is, sincere; but not too serious, for fear that you should not be sincere enough. We don't object here to any man's affections; we like to be honored, but not honored too much. If any of you can remember some creditable thing about me, I shouldn't mind his telling it, provided always he didn't blink the palliating circumstances, the mitigating motives, the selfish considerations that accompany every noble action. I shouldn't like to be made out a miracle of humor, either, and left a stumbling block for anyone who was intending to be moderately amusing and instructive hereafter. At the same time, I don't suppose that a commemoration is exactly the occasion for dwelling on a man's shortcomings in his life or his literature, or for realizing that he has entered on an immortality of oblivion.

As I listened to Howells and to the half-dozen others who spoke after him, and as I felt the warmth of friendly feeling and of comradely appreciation, I wished that Mark might have had the privilege he gave Tom Sawyer and that he could have returned to life to be present at his own funeral exercises.

What was said by the successive speakers was serious enough and yet not too serious for sincerity; and I perfectly understood what Howells meant when he wrote me a day or two later that he felt sure "Mark would have enjoyed it!"

(1919.)

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

Other papers by the same writer on kindred topics will be found in other volumes.

In 'Pen and Ink: Essays on Subjects of More or Less Importance' (1888) there are papers on the 'Antiquity of Jests,' the 'Ethics of Plagiarism,' and the 'True Theory of the Preface.'

In the 'Historical Novel and Other Essays' (1901) there are papers on 'Romance Against Romanticism,' and on 'Literature as a Profession.'

In 'Inquiries and Opinions' (1907) there are papers on the 'Supreme Leaders,' and 'An Apology for Technic.'

In the 'American of the Future and Other Essays' (1909) there are papers on 'American Character,' on 'American Manners,' on 'American Humor,' and on 'Reform and Reformers.'

In 'Gateways to Literature and Other Essays' (1912) there are papers on the 'Economic Interpretation of Literary History,' on the 'Duty of Imitation,' on the 'Devil's Advocate,' and 'In Behalf of the General Reader.'

NORTH CENTRAL COLLEGE
814M43T
C001
THE TOCSIN OF REVOLT NEW YORK
3 2611 00063248 5